MOLLY AND I
OR
THE SILVER RING

FRANK R. ADAMS

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"Uncle Sam, I love you."

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OR

THE SILVER RING

BY

FRANK R. ADAMS

AUTHOR OF "FIVE FRIDAYS"

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK GODWIN

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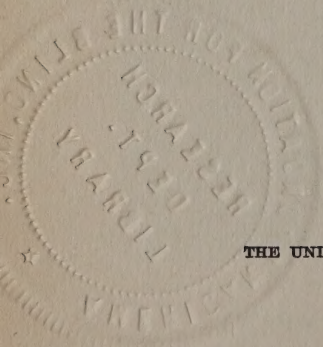

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THIS BOOK

LIKE MY HEART AND HAND, BELONGS TO

A. L. A.

WITHOUT WHOM MOLLY WOULD
NEVER HAVE EXISTED

THE SILVER RING

The silver ring so dear that once thou gavest me,
Fast in its tiny circlet our vows yet encloses:
The confidant of many fond mem'ries of thee,
Alone, in hours of sorrow, my heart it composes.

A ribbon such as binds a nosegay sweet of roses
Still the flowers entwines, tho' faded they may be;
So this poor silver ring, that once thou gavest me,
Fast in its tiny circlet our vows yet encloses.

So when, forgetting all, my heart at length reposes
In the last home that nevermore my eye shall see,
When I shall lie asleep, all pale amid the roses,
I will that on my withering finger there be
The silver ring so dear that once thou gavest me.

Song by C. CHAMINADE
English Version by Dr. Thomas Baker

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PART I

MOLLY AND I

CHAPTER I

MARRIAGES ARE NOT ALL MADE IN HEAVEN

THE blind man reached for his revolver. It was gone. And yet not thirty seconds before, he had laid it on the table before him.

As far as he knew he was alone in the room. One usually is when one contemplates the long lane that has no returning.

First a feeling of terror assailed him, then anger that he had been interfered with, and finally shame at having a fellow human being see him in the depths to which he had fallen.

"Well," he said finally, in an even monotone, "what is it all about? Who are you?"

"My name doesn't really matter, does it?"

A voice answered him, a woman's voice, rather strained with excitement.

The blind man rose awkwardly. He was thin and very tall, too tall for the room or for the furniture in it.

"No," he replied, after reflection. "Nothing really matters to me except that you have taken away the only piece of property that I had left in the world. I spent my last cent for it and I haven't the means to buy another. What right have you to strip me of my last possession?"

"The right of might," the woman's voice answered. She stood, he judged, just inside the door. "You can't help yourself and I'm sure you won't call in the police to make me return what I have taken."

He bowed his head in token of surrender.

"You have the drop on me," he admitted. "Won't you come in and close

the door, miss, or is it madam? You needn't answer. As you suggested a while ago, it doesn't matter. Now that you've got me, what are you going to do with me? It is only justice to tell you that I am a very fragile antique and will only do for an ornament. My days of usefulness are past. What are you going to do with me?'

"I want to talk first."

"All right. I can still do that."

"Aren't you just a little ashamed of feeling the way you do? Don't you think you are a wee bit cowardly?"

"Not cowardly now, but I think I will be if I have to go through twenty-four hours more of this fearful night, knowing that it is never going to lift. I have just come from the office of the most eminent eye specialist in New York. He cannot help me. I am a writer. I made a bare living by using my eyes until I used them up. I went blind this morning. Think

if you can what that would mean to you."

"Is there no hope?"

"None for me. The doctor said that there is a Swiss surgeon who does something to eyes like mine and once in a while he saves a pair, but he is out of the question for me. I haven't even money enough to pay my fare over on a cattle boat. Believe me if you can when I tell you I have argued it all out to myself. If I go on, merely existing, it is only a matter of a very short time till I shall have to make an exit in a mean and degraded fashion. To-day I am in the possession of all my faculties, to-morrow or next week I shall be a cringing, cowering weakling, afraid and lonesome in this darkness that no one can share. Blindness breaks down a man's moral courage. I'm not brave enough to face it." He paused. "Now you've made it even more difficult. You've

made me feel desperately in the wrong before another human being. You found me out. No one else in all the world knew what I was, knew that I was down and out — no use to anyone, including myself."

"That is the point I wish to bring up. You have no right to do what you intended without thinking of others."

"There isn't anyone — anyone whom I could benefit in the slightest degree."

"That's where you are mistaken. You can help me."

"You will pardon me if I allow an expression of dismay to cross my features, thus." He paused, smiling, with an expression that was anything but dismay. "Don't tell me you are a long-lost relative? Haven't I trouble enough? No? Then I shall assume a puzzled look and ask politely, 'How can I be of service to you?'"

"I thought you were like that."

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"Nothing at all. I was wondering if I dared ask you what I had in mind."

"Surely. Speak right out. My first impression was that your nerve was pretty good. What can I do for you?"

"Marry me."

Stunned silence fell upon the man. Then he laughed, not bitterly, but wholesomely and heartily. "This is so — unexpected," he demurred. "Explain further. What is the plot? How did I come to fascinate you so much that you suggest yourself as a substitute for annihilation?"

"I am quite serious, Mr. Smith."

"Oh, you know my name do you?"

"Yes. I know your first name is Philip, too. I always liked that name."

"Always liked it? Have we met before?" Philip Smith groped desperately in a mental chaos to connect the voice he

was listening to with some other characteristics of form and feature.

"Surely, we've met. Once you even danced with me."

"It must have been a long time ago. I haven't been attending many balls lately."

"It was — you were twenty and I was twelve but I made up my mind then that I'd marry you the very first chance I got."

"I can't place you," he confessed.

"No? I remember that at the time you didn't seem as enthusiastic about me as I was about you."

"I am truly sorry you delayed your —" he started to say "proposal" and changed suddenly — "your proposition until I have ceased to be available as husband material. If you knew me ten years ago you may recollect that my family fortune vanished in a night and, as I have just explained to

you, my personal earning capacity has just been blotted out with my eyesight."

"Not if you marry me. I know it sounds terribly cruel to say but the fact that you are blind is the thing that makes you most desirable as a husband."

"Great Scott," he ejaculated, "are you as bad as all that?"

"No, I'm not as bad as all that," she mimicked. "Now if you'll promise not to interrupt I'd like to lay this heavy revolver down and tell my story."

"Certainly. I'd draw up a chair for you if I were quite certain where the furniture in this room is. You see I've been blind such a short time, and Mrs. Jeffrey, that's my landlady, does provide such a knobby assortment of furniture with her hall-bedrooms. I'm sure there's another seat though, somewhere."

He heard her draw up a chair and as she sat down near him the faintest odor of a

delicate perfume assailed his nostrils. A heavy thud told of the revolver's being dropped on the table. He judged by the sound that she had placed it on his left. He sank down again into his own chair.

CHAPTER II

FOR THAT MATTER, NEITHER ARE WILLS

SHE did not begin talking at once. He felt that she was studying him and he was acutely conscious of his gaunt, heavily lined face. When last he had seen himself his features had been those of an old man. How much worse they must look now that the eyes had ceased to animate the mask!

The girl began:

"In the first place, I am an orphan and I have always lived with my aunt Lavinia. Now do you remember me? No? It doesn't matter. She was very wealthy and when she died last year she left all her money to me on condition that I marry on or before November 21, 1912, which

you probably know is to-morrow. What do you think of that?"

"I should say that you had been reading too much popular fiction. The idea of an heiress who must be married by a certain time in order to get her legacy is old stuff, — it has been worked to death. I tried it once myself in a novel, but the publishers said I stole the plot from the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"But you'll do it, won't you?"

"There was a time not so long ago when I seriously considered the idea of marrying a wealthy woman, but I decided against it. I'd rather be an honest failure under my own banner than live in affluence on somebody else's money. I've seen too many of that type."

"This is a little different. There is some more to this plot I haven't explained yet. I am not asking you to share my fortune with me. I merely want you to

do me a certain definite service, that is, go through the marriage service with me, for which I will make you a reasonable payment. Within a year I expect to get a divorce."

"Yes, that is quite conventional. But why pick me out for the honor? Why not choose some man from your immediate circle of friends?"

"One reason is because I happen to be engaged to one of them and everybody knows it."

Philip Smith tried to comprehend this statement. "Then why not marry the one you are engaged to?" he blurted out, finally.

"Because, please sir," she apologized meekly, "he's out exploring at the North Pole. He has been gone two years and won't be back until next fall anyway."

"Oh!"

"Doctor Allen, — he's the specialist you

went to about your eyes, — is my legal guardian. He and I were making arrangements for my wedding when that messenger-boy led you in."

"Making arrangements?" he echoed.

"Yes, we wrote an advertisement to send to all the morning papers offering $1000 to the man who would marry me tomorrow and promise never to see me again. We had just finished it when you arrived. It didn't occur to me until after you had gone again that you were a direct answer from Heaven to that advertisement which hadn't been published yet, but as soon as I got the idea I came after you."

"May I ask how you found me? Doctor Allen doesn't know my address."

"I trailed you. It isn't hard to pick up the track of a small messenger-boy leading a tall, thin, blind man in a check suit of an unbecoming shade."

He winced. "It's an English fabric,"

he defended, "a relic of days when I had money."

"Anyway it helped me find you," the woman's voice continued. "I got here just as your messenger-boy was leaving. I told him to wait downstairs and came in. If I had arrived a little later I would have felt like a widow. I was so set on having you for a husband." Her voice broke a little, telling of the intense excitement she had been masking with an affectation of levity.

The man debated slowly, "I still fail to see why I should be so honored."

The girl laughed a little hysterically and went on hastily, "Can't you understand that I don't want to marry anybody but if I have to I'd much rather be Mrs. Philip Smith than the wife of John Doe, the celebrated forger and blackmailer, which is probably what I'll be to-morrow if you don't help me out."

"The picture you draw of your plight is truly terrifying," he commented.

"Then you'll do it?" she asked, anxiously.

He laughed out loud at the sheer nonsense of it. "Just this once, if it will really help you any. I don't seem to have much choice in the matter. I'm your prisoner, — and life's."

"It's a bargain then. We'll shake hands on it." He heard her chair pushed back as she rose.

He also got slowly to his feet and extended his hand uncertainly before him.

It was grasped firmly across the table by slender, strong fingers. Hers was the hand of a capable person. The look on his face changed from amused tolerance to one of admiration. Unconsciously he stood straighter and held his head higher. A man is always taller if he has the faith of some woman in his keeping.

"By the way," he said casually, "if you will hand me that weapon you took away from me I'll put it out of sight and dispel the atmosphere of melodrama from this scene, which I see is conventional comedy."

Without hesitation she placed the revolver in his outstretched hand. He broke it, ejecting the chamber into his palm.

"You may have those," he offered, holding out the five cartridges.

She took them silently. He opened a drawer in the table and dropped the gun into it noisily.

"There, that's over," he said.

"You mean that?"

"Yes. Whatever has to be faced I'll meet. I should be ungrateful to you if I didn't do that much after you took the trouble to follow me half way across New York to save me from myself. What is next on the programme?"

"We'll get married and then we'll start you off on your honeymoon."

"My honeymoon?" His voice was blank astonishment.

"Yes. You're going to spend it all alone with the famous Swiss surgeon. I had Doctor Allen reserve a stateroom for you on the Franco-American boat sailing to-night."

"What if I refuse?"

"You can't. According to law a wife can arrange for medical attention for her husband when he is ill, even against his orders."

"I never heard of that law," Philip argued sceptically. "I don't believe it's on the statute books of this State."

"If it isn't it ought to be. Please," her voice took on a wheedling tone, "do as I have arranged and don't force me to make up laws in order to get my own way. Can we go now? Are you ready?"

"I'm as ready as I can be. This is no

wedding garment I am wearing but it must do. The tailor is late with my trousseau and we can't keep the guests waiting." He started across the room gaily, collided with the other chair, paused uncertainly and turned in the wrong direction.

"May I lead you?" asked the girl.

"I'm afraid you'll have to," he replied, simply. "I haven't been in the dark quite long enough yet to have my bearings."

On the front steps they picked up the messenger-boy. The girl suggested that they take him along as a witness and Philip gravely introduced the young man to her, mentioning "Jerry" as his name and speaking of the girl only as "my fiancée."

The wedding party formed, they hailed a taxi and directed the chauffeur to drive to the office of the city clerk. There they discovered that they could not be married immediately on a New York license and returned to the taxi in some perturbation.

"If you want to get married," said the taxi driver, who took in their situation from scraps of conversation, "you can get a license and a justice of the peace over in Jersey that can do the trick without delay."

"Do you know right where to go?" the girl questioned anxiously.

"Sure. I take a wedding party over there about once a week."

"The same one?"

"No, — not the entire party. I took one man twice, though, with a different girl each time. I guess the first knot didn't hold."

"Mr. Smith," said she, "have you time to go over to New Jersey with me?"

"Certainly," he replied. "I have all the rest of my life to devote to carrying out your wishes. I haven't any other plan for whatever future there may be for me. Behold the first slave since the Civil War!"

"And you, Jerry?"

"I can stay as long as you pay for me."

"Then, all aboard for the uncharted seas of New Jersey. Chauffeur, you may come about and head her nose into the teeth of the gale. Stop at the first altar you come to."

The car ran smoothly, the birds sang merrily, the sun shone brightly for all but one of the wedding party, and everything was as smooth as the preliminaries of a carefully arranged ceremony planned for months ahead. A thoughtful silence settled upon the girl. Philip engaged Jerry in serious conversation.

"Jerry," he said,"have you got such a thing as a 'Nick Carter' about you?"

The messenger-boy preserved a suspicious silence for a moment, then answered gruffly, "No, I ain't. What did you want it for?"

"I thought I'd ask you to read to my

fiancée and myself. I supposed messenger-boys always carried a copy of 'Nick Carter' about with them."

"Aw, I don't read them things no more. Nobody but young kids reads 'Nick Carter' these days."

"Is that so? What do you do with your spare time?"

"I read the sporting dope in the pink sheet,—the baseball stuff and all that."

"I consider it a howling shame the way we modern people outgrow our simple, childish amusements. Here you've abandoned the idol of childhood at an age when your grandfather was still reading fairy stories."

Jerry sniffed audibly.

"I take it," continued the man, "that you don't care much for fairy stories either. No?"

"Aw, quit kidding me."

"Maybe you never heard a first-class,

hand-made, fairy story. For instance, did anyone ever relate to you the authentic history of 'The Fairy Queen Who Had a Wooden Leg'?"

"Aw, go on."

"Yes, do go on."

"You're not supposed to be listening. This is a fairy story for the simple wise men of the city and for the blind. Fatima, put a tango record on the electric piano and hearken to what we are about to narrate."

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE FAIRY QUEEN WHO HAD A WOODEN LEG

ONCE upon a time there was a fairy by the name of Patsy who had hard luck. She was born on a very rainy Friday in November when the wind was howling so loud that she had to yell like a baseball fan to make herself heard at all.

When finally her mother, who was the queen of all the fairies, looked up and saw that Patsy was born she spoke to her husband, who was reading the paper and hadn't noticed anything, either. Like most women she hastened to blame the man. "Look, Cyril," she said, "you've got a daughter." And with that she paid no more attention to Patsy but went on with her breakfast, which consisted of

sweet alyssum flowers on toast and a bluebell cup full of dew.

Cyril laid down his paper crossly. "This sort of thing has got to stop. There are too many fairies already. So few children believe in us nowadays that it's hard enough for what fairies there are to make a living without adding to the band. You must think that I'm running an orphan asylum. Do you know how much honey is an ounce? The last we bought cost nineteen sprays of goldenrod and they say it's going up, too."

He walked over to Patsy and looked at her searchingly. "She's an ugly little thing," he commented. "It's going to be hard to get the children to believe in anything with a red nose and such large ears." He paused and then went on. "By George, she looks a good deal like your family."

"What's that you say about my family?" The queen stopped eating and confronted

her husband, her eyes blazing with anger. "My family indeed! What right have you to talk about my family? What were you before I married you? I'll tell you. You were a low-down, common, green or garden kind of a fairy, that's what you were. You used to say 'ain't' and 'seen' and 'done' and you ate jonquil buds with a knife."

Cyril was silent because he knew that what she said was true.

"And," continued the queen, "just because you said what you did you may have entire charge of the child. I have to attend a special meeting of the Federation of Fairy Godmothers."

With that she flounced out of the room. Cyril was so angry at having his wife get the better of him in an argument that he paid no attention to Patsy whatever, save to push her out of the way with his foot as he grabbed up his coat and crown and

set out to spend the day at the club, where he lost a good deal of fairy money in a game of auction pinochle and drank more heliotrope wine than was good for him.

With that kind of a start you could hardly expect Patsy to be much of a success as a fairy, and she wasn't. Her parents, both of them, always regarded her as a sort of step-child. As a result of that she had to get along with a very poor assortment of clothes, in fact, cast-offs of every description. For instance, she would often be seen wearing an old torn robe made of rose petals that her mother had thrown away, and a patched pair of her father's cobweb pants, cut down to fit, of course. You'll have to admit that with that sort of a ragamuffin equipment it's pretty hard to be convincing. What would you think if a forlorn-looking, little fairy, dressed like that, with a dirty face and maybe a black eye, should suddenly

appear to you and offer to grant you three wishes?

Nobody would believe in her. Usually they'd just laugh at her, which hurt her feelings, but sometimes they would put her out and threaten to squash her with a fly-swatter if she came around again. This was terribly discouraging, especially as she wasn't any good in the world except to grant wishes. Patsy started out the year with the power to grant a hundred wishes and along in November, with the year nearly up, she had ninety-nine of 'em left. The only wish she had been able to grant was that of an old lady she was trying to help with her knitting. Accidentally Patsy dropped the yarn and got it all tangled up and the old lady said, "I wish you'd go and jump in the lake." Patsy had to grant her wish. The water was cold, too.

There was only one thing Patsy really

enjoyed. That was dancing on roofs. As you probably know, whenever it rains, all the fairies who aren't on duty somewhere, turn out and dance on the roofs. They like tin roofs best because they tinkle so nicely, but any kind of roof will do except a flat, gravel one. That kind isn't any fun. Patsy had a great deal of time for dancing because no one wanted her for anything else. You'd think that she would have become the best dancer of all the fairies, but she didn't. On the contrary she was always stumbling and slipping. Very often she'd slip on one of those slanting, shingle roofs and fall several stories down to the ground. But she'd laugh, pick herself up, and go back to the roof and dance some more, none the worse except for a bruise or so and maybe another tear in her father's cobweb trousers.

One night, when there was a terrific

storm, Patsy found the loveliest tin roof she had ever danced on. It was loose in spots and rattled ever so loudly when she stamped her tiny feet. She was all alone on this particular roof and whirled and leaped and raced to her heart's content. Never before had she made so much noise. The storm grew more boisterous, it lightened and thundered, and Patsy had to stamp louder than ever to match the thunder for racket.

All at once there was an especially loud bang, the tin beneath her feet gave way and she fell right through the roof. It would not have damaged her at all if she hadn't struck her leg on the foot-board of a bed when she landed. As it was, when she tried to stand up again she couldn't because her leg had been broken off at the knee. It didn't hurt because her legs and arms and body were only made of twilight mist anyway but it was mighty

inconvenient. She picked up the broken-off piece and was trying to fit it back on when she heard a nice voice saying, "Can I help you?"

Patsy looked up, and there, sitting up in bed, was a boy who was very pale but who smiled with a friendly look that she had never seen on anybody's face before. She forgot all about her broken leg and smiled right back at him.

"I heard you dancing up there," he said, "and I was afraid that you might fall through. The roof needs mending but we are very poor and can't afford it."

"You heard me dancing?" exclaimed Patsy, joyfully. "Then you believe in me?"

"Sure," said the little sick boy, and Patsy was so pleased that she danced up and down on one leg, that being all she had left, and crawled right up into his lap, so to speak.

"Now," said the little boy, "let me help you mend yourself."

Patsy didn't tell him that all she had to do was to take the broken pieces home and have herself wished together again, because she was so pleased to have someone believe in her. So she let him make her a wooden leg out of a match, which he tied on with a strand of his own hair almost as fine and soft as a spider's thread.

All that rainy afternoon she stayed and played with him until his mother, who worked out by the day, came home along toward dusk and lit the gas with Patsy's wooden leg, not noticing that Patsy was attached to it. Women who work out by the day scrubbing floors and washing windows naturally do not believe in fairies and so, of course, can't see them. Patsy wasn't hurt in the least and rather liked the effect of the blackened wood, when

the match was blown out. But fairies can't stay around people who don't believe in them, so Patsy assured the little boy that she'd be back the next day when he was alone and went through the hole in the tin roof.

She came back the next day and the day after that and so on for a long time until they became fast friends. As he was the only person in all the world who believed in her, she had a lot of time to spend on him. She'd dance for him by the hour on the narrow foot-board of the bed, her wooden leg drumming an irregular tattoo, and sometimes to make him laugh she'd fall and do a somersault backwards on the bed. Other times she'd tell stories about things that had happened to her and he'd laugh over her mishaps, but always in such a way that she knew he was sorry for her at the same time.

Oh, they did hundreds of things, and

neither of them had ever had such good times before.

Then one day she found the little boy too weak to sit up in bed and when he tried to smile at her he couldn't because he was too tired. The Fairy With a Wooden Leg was alarmed but she did not want to let him know it so she was twice as cheerful as ever before. All day long she told funny stories and danced and did hand-springs but it wasn't any use. He grew weaker and weaker and finally when the room grew dim at twilight, he shut his eyes. Patsy hovered over him to see if he was asleep. No. He was still awake but he was so tired that he could barely breathe.

She realized that she must redouble her efforts so she sang as loud as she could and did somersaults for him from the foot of the bed. That had always made him laugh before but now he didn't even

see her. She danced so hard with her wooden leg that she splintered it but the little boy's heart-beats grew slower and slower.

Patsy began to cry a little. What could she do? Except the queen none of the fairies is allowed to grant life to a dying person. None of them would dare even try it because the queen in wrath would immediately destroy the reckless fairy who dared to usurp her power.

The only person in the world who believed in her was going away on slow heart-beats and Patsy couldn't overtake him and stop him. What would she do without him? Where would be the fun in dancing on the roofs in the rain again all by herself? Swiftly she made up her mind she would try to grant life to the little boy. She might be able to save him before the queen found out and destroyed her, and she didn't mind much being de-

stroyed, although she wondered what it would be like.

So she began saying the magic words of the royal incantation and wishing with all her heart that the little boy might live. As she said the words the room began to grow lighter and there was a terrifying hum in the air. It was power, but was it being used for the little boy or against her? Patsy didn't know enough about the effect of the royal incantation, to be sure, but she went bravely on, never faltering. All at once there was a blinding flash and that was all that she remembered.

The next thing she knew she was lying in a corner of the room, and bending over the little boy's bed were two men using a strange piece of machinery that hummed like a swarm of bees. The little boy was alive. But the strangest of all Patsy noticed that the room was filled with

fairies, hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of them, all drawn up in glittering ranks kneeling before her. She got up and walked down the lines in front of them, limping a little on her wooden leg.

One of the fairies threw a shimmering robe of lacy spider web across her shoulders and another set a crown, jewelled with dewdrops, upon her brow.

"What does this mean?" demanded Patsy. "Are you dressing me up like this to destroy me?"

"No," replied one of the fairies, "we dress you thus because you are our queen."

And so she was, and that explained why she was able to grant life to the little boy.

The former queen, Patsy's mother, had been annihilated that very morning in trying to grant the wishes of some English suffragettes. She thought it was a toy balloon she was sitting on, but it wasn't.

CHAPTER IV

A SILVER WEDDING RING

"NOW," said Philip, after a pause, "you naturally ask what became of the little boy, don't you?"

"Yes," said Jerry, rather ashamed to admit that he had been interested in the story.

"He got well. The doctors from the County Hospital said the pulmotor saved him but the little boy himself knows better. He grew strong and when he became a man he was one of the best pitchers in the National League."

"Do you mean Matty?"

"I didn't say, but you can find out if you watch for the one who goes around picking up burnt matches and putting them in his pockets. He's in hopes that

some day he'll find the one that Patsy is using for a wooden leg, so he can thank her."

"Tell some other adventures of the fairy who had a wooden leg," suggested the girl.

"I would," replied Philip, "but something in the feel of the air tells me that we are in New Jersey, and therefore must stop."

"Why?"

"Why, to be married. I hate to remind you of such a thing but you suggested it yourself."

"I know it. I had completely forgotten."

The car came to a stop.

"Is this the place, driver?" the girl inquired.

"Yes, ma'm. They give you the whole business, including the third degree, right in the same building. The clerk sells you the license and a special permit and a

justice of the peace right across the hall does the rough work, — I mean, marries you."

"All right." The girl got out of the car and helped the blind man to follow her. "Come along, Jerry, and you too, driver. We'll need witnesses."

The clerk proved obliging and the matter of the license was quickly got over. Then, marshalled by the chauffeur, who was full of get-hitched-quick information, the party sought the justice of the peace across the hall.

There they found another wedding party ahead of them and they were politely requested to wait until the judge was at liberty. This they did, fidgeting nervously like patients in a dentist's ante-room.

"O dear!" murmured the girl. "I wish I had a mother or a father or somebody here. I feel so friendless."

"How can you feel friendless when you

so nearly have a husband?" Philip smiled reassuringly.

"Lots of women who have really truly husbands feel that way." She was silent a moment and then asked, "Before you marry me wouldn't you like to know what I look like? Shall I describe myself to you?"

"No," replied Philip slowly, "I should prefer not to know what you look like."

"Oh!"

"Don't be offended. There are two reasons for that. One is because if I have no clue as to your appearance you are doubly sure of my not bothering you any in the future."

"And what's the other reason?"

"The other reason is that I have always had a certain ideal for my wife and as it would be ridiculous to assume that you are even of that type it seems better to me to retain my ideal than to have it sup-

planted by a contrary though charming reality."

"I am just curious enough to want to know what your ideal is."

"Don't you know that the hardest task that a novelist has is the description of his heroine?" Philip paused and after a moment's thought continued, "My wife, as I have pictured her, need not look like anything in particular,—her hair might be straight and black or very fluffy and light,—not too blonde of course,—her eyes can be any color at all, so long as they are soft,—her nose quite Roman,—"

"Oh!" breathed the girl.

"Or with the tip turned skyward, and she can be any size so long as I can pick her up and carry her. But there will be something I shall recognize when we meet, a sympathy that will reach out and enfold me, an understanding that will require no explanations, and I shall know her

step when she comes to me for it will fall into perfect time with the beating of my heart." Then with an abrupt change of manner he added, "Of course you realize that I am quoting a paragraph from one of my unpublished novels."

"By George!" exclaimed the best man and chauffeur. "We forgot to get a ring!"

"A ring?" Philip echoed blankly. "Do we have to have a ring?"

"Well," replied the veteran of a thousand taxi elopements, "some people are married without them, I guess."

"I won't be," declared the girl firmly, "and that's all there is to it. My mother had a ring and I'm going to have one. That's about all I'm going to get out of this marriage business anyway, and I want it. I wonder if there is a jewelry store near."

"My mother gave me her wedding ring," said Philip slowly, "and I have it now.

We'll use that if you are willing. I think mother would be glad to have it worn by her daughter-in-law." He took a small silver circlet from his pocket. It was the only thing he had not pawned.

"It's a curious bit of jewelry, isn't it?" he added, as he handed it to her. "It's silver, rather skillfully carved. The work is Chinese, I believe. Some of the tracery is worn very thin but it's quite distinct."

The bride took it with an exclamation of delight. "Oh, it's beautiful. Will you really truly let me wear it while we are being married?"

"Yes, and as long as you live after that."

"Thank you ever so much. I shall always keep it." After a pause during which she evidently examined it very closely she exclaimed, "Why, there's some fine engraving on the inside!"

"That," said Philip hastily, "is just some sentimental nonsense my father had

put on. In those days people cared a lot more about that sort of thing than they do now. Don't bother to try to make it out."

"But it isn't any bother. I've made it out already." In a lowered voice she read softly, "'Until death do us part.'"

"That sounds silly, doesn't it, in these days," Philip said, a trifle wistfully.

"No, — it isn't silly. I love it."

"But we are about to part right now," he objected.

The judge shooed a newly married couple from his office.

"All ready," he announced genially to the waiting group.

"The alarm has sounded," said Philip. "Maritari salutamus. Now if someone will play a wedding march on a comb we will advance upon the altar. Jerry, you will escort the bride and I'll bring up the rear with my best man."

Getting married was absurdly casual. It didn't seem possible that life-long bonds could be assumed in so short a time. One moment you were a timorous, cowering bachelor, free to come and go at will, and the next, presto, you had said "yes" once or twice and you were a substantial, settled, married man with more obligations and responsibilities than it was possible or pleasant to remember.

When it was over the judge shook hands with both of them and nudged the blind man jovially.

"Philip Smith," he reminded him, with a laugh, "you haven't kissed your wife, Mary Smith, yet. She's waiting."

Philip turned toward her with a quizzical smile.

"Are you?" he asked.

"Yes." The answer was soft so that he barely heard it, but she placed her hand in his trustingly.

When he started awkwardly to put his arm around her he heard her laugh with a catch in her voice.

"I'm not 'way up there," she said, "I'm down here."

PART II

CHAPTER V

INTRODUCING A VAMPIRE

WHEN the big liner swung away from the tender at Southampton and pushed her nose luxuriously through the long swells that seemed to come all the way from New York, Philip Smith smiled a nice contented smile and prepared to be joyful all the rest of his life. A man whose sight has been restored to him after nearly a year in the dark has reason to be an optimist. The world is a much better thing to look at than we who see it all the time realize. Even the bewhiskered Swiss doctor had been a beautiful picture when Philip looked on him as the bandages were removed for the first time, and the capable, stout nurses had been visions of loveliness in the six weeks that he had spent in their care.

Think, then, how wonderful it was to look forward to seeing once more the Goddess of Liberty, Sandy Hook, Coney Island, the Battery, the ferries and the ragged, jagged skyline of the slender City of Desire.

Of the passengers Philip knew only one, John Herrick by name, a magazine artist he had met in Paris. Herrick had been a promising youngster in the early nineties but the necessity of earning a living had worn him out and now he was middle-aged, rather fat, and unable to reach for the laurel that Fame held just above his head. Herrick was one to whom petty success had come so easily that it had robbed him of the incentive to make a supreme effort. He had sat back so long promising himself that to-morrow he would begin that salon painting that now he no longer deceived even himself.

He was a bit of a pessimist, was Herrick,

but not very seriously so, and his complaints amused Philip, who discounted them ninety per cent.

It was through Herrick that Philip met Mrs. Sutherland the second day out. She was also of the artist colony, not a worker but a "hanger on."

"Here," said Herrick, halting Philip as they were going around the promenade for the second time, "let me introduce you to Mrs. Sutherland." He faced his friend toward a steamer chair in the lee of the main cabin. "Mrs. Sutherland, my friend Mr. Smith. Marian, get up and walk with this exercise fiend and let me have your steamer rug and chair. Give me whatever you're reading and I'll go right on with it for you."

"No, thank you, Jack. If you wish to sit down, there is a chair on either side of me you know, and here is my book; it's the third one by Chambers that I've read

about her was luxuriant, her dark hair, her eyes, the coloring of lips and cheek, and the long, soft lines of her figure. Added to that was a skill in that difficult art of femininity which makes the most of every advantage which Nature has bestowed. You felt that here was an artist, whose person was at once her studio and her masterpiece.

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance at last, Mr. Smith," she was saying. "I have used so many of your cough drops."

Philip looked at her for the trace of a smile. There was none. She was playing straight.

"I'm afraid I'm the wrong Smith. My career has to do with literature instead of lungs, and as yet the only persons who even know I have a career are myself and those to whom I have told it. I may even have failed to convince the last mentioned."

"An author," she mused. "I knew an author once, but he was not nearly as nice as you are."

"But I'm not a successful author. I'm much nicer on that account. I think I've heard Mr. Herrick speak of you in Paris, Mrs. Sutherland. Are you an artist too, and if so, what have you done?"

"I've done nothing except to be unhappily married twice. But that is nothing because I believe all marriages to be unhappy."

"Then," Philip questioned, "why did you marry more than once?"

Jack removed his attention from Mrs. Sutherland's book long enough to reply, "She did it to prove that she was right."

"Speaking of marriage," continued Mrs. Sutherland, directing an appraising glance at Philip, "did you leave your wife in Europe, Mr. Smith?"

"My wife!" Philip was genuinely startled.

"Yes," Mrs. Sutherland resumed, evenly. "You are married aren't you? It's no disgrace, you know."

"Why, yes," he confessed. "I do happen to have been married, but no one, not even my most intimate friend, knows it. How did you guess?"

Mrs. Sutherland considered a moment. "I presume it was because I liked you as soon as I saw you. I never like anyone without finding out that he belongs to someone else." She laughed lightly.

"I suppose then," Philip went on in the same vein, "that you will lose all interest in me now that you know that I am married."

"Not at all. Unless he takes it seriously a marriage or two makes a man all the more attractive. The fact that one woman has put her tag on a man immedi-

ately stimulates other women to find out why she did it. For another thing, married men are wickeder than bachelors."

"They're not any wickeder really, but they have press agents."

"Personally," she went on with a smile, "I am willing to be interested in any man for a short space of time and then let him go. I feel that it is a sort of duty."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Well, for one thing, there are more women than men in the world."

"Yes, but remember that it is quality and not quantity that counts."

"And," Marian ignored the interruption, "as there are so few men it is only fair for one woman to keep a man a short time and then let him go so that someone else can have him."

"You speak of man as if he were a volume in a circulating library. Are these theories of yours merely a frivolous mask

or do you really mean them? Don't you ever really care?"

Her face sobered and she let her glance travel past the rail to the sparkling sea beyond where some gulls were conducting some experiments in fancy aviation. "The pity of it is that I used to care a great deal, but whenever I really cared there wasn't any fun in it because I always got hurt."

"So now you let the other fellow do all the caring and get all the hurting."

"I find it is easier." She turned a dazzling smile on him. "I trust you don't mind meeting me with my mask off this way. Here I am telling you all about myself and we're not yet acquainted. It has one advantage, — it leaves you less to be disappointed in, later."

"Since you are telling me all about yourself, what manner of woman are you?"

"If you really want to know," she replied, with engaging candor, "I'm the

sort of person other women never like and men call 'a great girl to have a good time with,' so you see I haven't any real friends in the world. I admit that in some ways I am attractive."

Here was an adversary so sure of herself that she dared throw all her weapons on the table in the presence of her enemy.

"I have to admit that, too," he replied, smiling.

"But it never amounts to anything. There's something beyond just 'attracting' that I never seem to attain. So there you have me, — a nice, harmless vampire that you can have a lot of fun with, fearless of consequences."

"Confound such a book," Jack exclaimed, handing the volume back to Mrs. Sutherland.

"What's the matter, Jack?" she enquired sympathetically. "Don't you care for pure but passionate heroines?"

"Oh, the text is all right, but the illustrations! None of the pictures match up with what the author describes. I don't believe that the artist read a page of the book."

"Who did the illustrating?" Philip asked.

"I'll see," declared Mrs. Sutherland, opening the book to the frontispiece. "It's signed John Herrick. You did it yourself, Jack!"

"What? Let's look. By George, I remember now. I did that stuff five years ago. I was too busy that season to read novels. Chambers should have fixed the story up after he saw the pictures."

Later, when a bugle call for dinner sent Mrs. Sutherland to her stateroom to dress, Philip asked the artist about her.

"I don't need to tell you. She'll do it herself. I give her credit for being truthful to those she loves."

"But to the rest of us what is she?"

"There isn't any 'rest of us,' my boy. Marian loves all of us. Even I have been honored with a short summer's flirtation. That was years ago when I was young and slender. You promise to be a shining mark for her adoration because you're so reticent you will make her mad and then she'll have to bring you to your knees to satisfy her self-respect. As an especially shy bird I shall watch your subjugation with interest."

"Forewarned is forearmed, so I thank you."

"Forewarned isn't anything of the sort with Marian, so don't thank me."

"What about Mr. Sutherland?"

"He is a prehistoric myth, dead, divorced, or wilfully missing, maybe."

Philip allowed himself to contemplate with pleasure the enforced association for the length of the voyage with an at-

tractive woman. Of course he discounted Herrick's estimate of Mrs. Sutherland and his prediction of a romance between her and himself, but the idea of spending idle, sunny days and moonlit evenings in the company of a person of such definite, feminine charm interested him.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE SEA SPELL

AFTER dinner they met again and he was startled to discover that on their introduction he had not realized the full extent of her beauty. She was standing on the companionway leading to the main saloon, — a stunning woman always looks best on the stairs, — carrying on a combined conversation and love scene with the ship's doctor, always first aid to the flirtatious. She had draped herself in an evening gown of a dark metallic gray and the train of it eddied around her feet and overflowed to the step below giving her an added and regal height. Philip's impression was that he had never seen any one so daringly and gorgeously gowned,

but when he came to analyze his thoughts he was at a loss to explain why. Surely the color of the fabric was as modest as it is possible to get, it was not cut particularly décolleté, quite the opposite in fact, and was very simply designed, with none of the eccentricities of modern extreme fashions. Still the impression persisted that her raiment was like a diaphanous veil. Long afterward he decided that such was the woman's magnetic personality that she projected herself outside her garments and that she wore this, as well as other gowns, not as clothing but as an outer skin.

She swiftly swept Philip into her conversation with the doctor and cleverly gave the impression that Philip had joined her by a prearranged plan. So the doctor shortly afterwards excused himself and with a sigh left mere inclination behind and went on about his unofficial duty of

hunting out the shy, unpopular passengerine and engaging her in a Dolly Dialogue.

"Shall we walk outside?" Mrs. Sutherland asked, as they mounted the steps together, instinctively drawing away from the crowd.

"If it isn't too cool for you," he agreed.

"I can get my wrap if I need it. My stateroom is an outside one on the hurricane deck."

They walked in the silence of moonlight, each content in the presence of a congenial personality, neither anxious to begin any discussions that might break the harmony. Quite naturally she tucked her hand under his arm and contentedly hummed a snatch of a happy little air they had both heard in Paris.

Being with her away from the throng and the lights, Philip found his impression of her undergoing another change. In

the afternoon she had seemed a cynical, slightly wearied woman of the world, in the saloon she was a siren, an enchantress, and here, matching her stride with his moderated one, she seemed only a man's good comrade. He knew that she would say the right thing, laugh in the proper places and understand his mood no matter how swiftly he changed it.

"I'm glad you have decided that you like me." She stopped humming in the midst of the melody.

"What makes you think I've decided?"

"Because I feel so comfortable with you. I'm sure I couldn't feel that way unless you liked me. To be with some men, even the most interesting ones, is a strain and I can't stand it for long, while to be with others is actually restful. I have an idea that we could be pretty fair pals even when we weren't tuned up to concert pitch."

"To state it differently, in a world of artichokes and green peppers I am a nice, sensible, boiled onion."

"No, I mean that in a world full of a number of things such as you mention you would be anything you wanted to be, even if it were quite different from the neighboring vegetables."

"I don't know that I quite understand you."

"For that matter, no man ever understands a woman."

"How can you say that when there are so many confirmed bachelors?"

"My friend, there would be just as many woman who would be bachelors if nature hadn't planned otherwise. We women have to marry for several reasons, and the chief one is not 'for support.' Almost all of us can earn a living of some sort if we have to, but if a woman doesn't marry she becomes an object

of pity and solicitude to the rest of her sex. You never heard married men making fun of a bachelor of thirty-five, did you?"

"In my limited experience, no."

"There you have the key to the matrimonial game as played by woman."

"You don't mean to say that you married without being in love?"

The woman looked away to where the blue depths of the night were only broken by the moon-tipped crests of the waves.

"No," she answered slowly, "I've been in love and I've been married, but never simultaneously. I've had too many love affairs, but the men I've cared about must have seen through me, because I always married the man who cared about me instead."

"Philanthropically?"

"No, — hungrily. Women are never philanthropic where their hearts are con-

cerned. I married, hoping to find something that did not exist. Then when the experiment proved a failure I gave it up and passed on to the next one."

"Do you think, then, that a woman ought to marry without loving the man in the case? Do you think she is justified in deceiving him?"

"Justified? She is compelled to or she could never win one. In the woman's code there are no rules — only penalties for losing. But if you are married you know all this from experience. Did your marriage bring you happiness?"

"Not yet."

"Are you going to tell me about it or am I going to do all the talking clear across the Atlantic?"

"I'll try to do my half. Here, then, is the story of my life." Philip paused, marshalled his thoughts and began glibly, "I gave up my freedom several years ago in

Europe. My prospective widow was a Viennese. She was tall, well built, with dark hair and eyes and, —" he hesitated for further description, — "and she played the saxaphone beautifully. I am always overcome with emotion this way when I think of how she played 'Way Down Upon the Swanee River' with variations."

"I am afraid," murmured Marian, in the pause, "that your literary training is causing you to embellish your autobiography."

"Which you have to admit," returned Philip, "is much more ladylike than saying I am a liar right out loud. You don't have to hear any more of this story if you don't want to."

"No," she urged politely, "go on; that is, if you can think of any more."

"Where was I?" he resumed. "Oh yes, we were married, my wife and I and the saxaphone, and we lived happily together

for over a year. Then I noticed a change. She no longer cared to read my unfinished manuscripts. I looked for the cause and discovered that a slide-trombone player had moved into our neighborhood. When I heard them play together I knew what had happened. Did you ever hear a slide-trombone and a saxaphone perform simultaneously? No? Well, I had reckoned without my wife's musical temperament. It was too late to interfere. They had been practising together for over a week before I noticed it, and they could play 'O Promise Me' with hardly any mistakes. There was a scandal, of course, but I hushed things up as much as possible considering that there was a slide-trombone in the affair. After she went away with him the neighbors sent him a loving cup."

"Thank you so much for giving me your confidence this way," said Marian, when

he had concluded. "No wonder you write novels when your life has been such a romance."

They drifted on to talk of many things and she succeeded in drawing Philip out actually to tell her of his work, what he hoped for and what the chances were for realization. All the while he felt that her interest and sympathy were genuine and he gave himself over to it hungrily as one who has long been away from civilization steeps himself in the artificialities of life when he returns.

When he had said "Good night," and left her at the door of her stateroom her spell still persisted and he warmed over the commonplaces of their intimacy and revelled in them. For years he had not allowed himself to be interested in a charming woman and this shipboard flirtation saw the rebirth of old social instincts. In the light of the stars he asked

himself if it might not become more than a flirtation.

Why not?

Here he was, without family or real friends in the world. Why shouldn't he take the warm affection which he knew this woman would give him? There seemed no question in his mind but that they were very congenial. Seldom had he met anyone of such ready understanding and quick sympathy. He was not in love with her — no, not yet, anyway, but perhaps he was too old for sentiment. He smiled at this last idea. A novelist's heroes are almost always his own age at the time he is writing. Ask any author.

In all the world he had only one tie, his wife, but surely he could consider that negligible. An arrangement entered into merely to accommodate a stranger seeking to evade the law was not a moral obli-

gation. He had never seen the lady and as a souvenir of their meeting he had a single letter. It must have been mailed immediately after his departure for Europe because he had received it before the operation on his eyes.

The nurse had brought it to him in the darkened room to which he had been sentenced for preparation and asked him in broken English if she should read it to him.

He had taken it in his hand and had recognized instantly the faint perfume of the sender. For a moment he thought of keeping it until he should be able to read it privately if he ever could read anything again, then he realized that sentiment was extraneous to affairs between his wife and himself and directed the nurse to do her worst.

She did. Translated back again into English it had read:—

Dear Friend Husband: —

I have arranged by cable to have your operation as soon as it is wise. Will it help any if you know that I and the Fairy Queen with the Wooden Leg are both wishing every minute that it will not hurt much and that you will be able to see us next time we meet even if you don't recognize us?

Patsy, the Fairy Queen, says to tell you that she is the mother of twins and that she has named the prettiest one Philip after you regardless of my protests regarding its gender. Philip is sitting on the paper as I write, trying to cut some of her fairy teeth on the end of my pen-holder and tracking ink all over because she stepped on a big word before it was quite dry.

Whatever lies in store for you don't forget the promise you made on your wedding day to your wife,

Mary Smith.

P.S.

I don't mean the promise you made before the judge who married us, but the one you made to me all alone when I first found you that day.

M. S.

It had been thoughtful of her to write to him when he had been all alone with no one else to give him a word of encouragement, but of course it was merely an act of charity on her part. She was probably even now entering suit for divorce, so he could consider the incident closed. True, his mind would wander back to dwell curiously on the tones of her voice, her laugh and the confiding trustfulness of the slender hand he had held for five minutes while the magistrate mumbled the only magic incantation left in our language. But it all seemed unreal, a dream in his night of blindness when all the things he knew and was familiar with had disappeared and he had lived in a black world filled only with stumbling-blocks and faraway voices.

While he walked, the ship went to sleep; one by one the lights winked out, there was no sound save an occasional swish of

water alongside, the throb of the screw grew more insistent, and overhead the great smokestacks trailed inky fingers across the spangled sky.

Other promenaders had disappeared; the only comrade of his unrest in evidence was the navigating officer on the bridge. Still he stayed on, unwilling to pen himself up in a stateroom. It was a night to dream, to revel in unthinking beauty. The joy and desire of life throbbed strong in his breast and the moon bade his fancy run riot in her carnival world. Before long he would be back in New York, with his life to begin over, to build as he would, and this thought stimulated him so that it was a matter of hours before he felt the least desire to seek his stateroom.

CHAPTER VII

AN APARTMENT SCARCELY LARGE ENOUGH FOR ONE

WHEN he arrived in New York Philip had allowed Herrick to arrange lodgings for him in the same building with his own and Mrs. Sutherland's. He had no old associations that he cared to renew and he was quite willing to have the artist and Marian for friendly neighbors. It was cheerful to have someone handy to eat dinners with at the nearby cafés or to call on when paper and ink failed to connect in the form of literature.

The furnished apartment that Herrick had selected for his friend was a tiny affair designed for just the sort of bachelor that he was. It was divided into four

separate cells, three of which were bedroom, bathroom and kitchenette. The other, more spacious, combined in itself reception-hall, living-room, dining-room and study.

Fortunately, the windows of the main room looked out over the city and afforded a view of the open sky. These windows, three in number, bulged outward in bow effect, and had clear glass in the lower half and small leaded panes in the upper. The thoughtful builder had placed the steam radiator before the principal window so that in winter it was uncomfortable to sit near the light.

The kitchenette was rather dark, but as Herrick explained you did not need any light after the first few days because you could reach anything in it from the center of the room without moving your feet. Philip shunned its mysteries at first and either took all his meals at the restau-

rant in the building or had them sent up to the apartment.

With an adaptability he was surprised at finding that he possessed, Philip settled down immediately in his new surroundings and began to work. He managed to find room for a second-hand desk which he purchased from a nearby shop and, mounting a rented typewriter upon it, he was armed to assail literature in her fortress.

Many hours a day he worked. By that it is not meant that he worked at a feverish pace for long at a stretch. Such happy facility was denied him as well as most authors since Sir Walter Scott. Fully two thirds of his time was spent in staring blankly at his typewriter or in walking about the room, avoiding instinctively the furniture hazards of his course. His brain, however, was constantly active, either in actual construction or in beating

unsuccessfully against a wall of refractory ideas.

Some of his hours of recreation were spent with Marian who had the happy faculty of stimulating him when things were moving along smoothly and of soothing him when he was "stuck." His companionship with her had retained just enough of an element of mystery to keep his interest vividly alive. He felt sure that he was not in love with her, because thoughts of her did not interfere with his work, nor was he jealous of her association with other men, but he accepted gratefully the comfort of semi-intimate association with an attractive woman.

Philip had returned to New York with mind fully made up to take advantage of his restored eyesight and to do regular work at his chosen calling as a writer. Despite his acknowledged pleasure in Mrs. Sutherland's society, he resolutely

put out of his mind every suggestion of a possible romance and deliberately treated her with a hale good fellowship copied after Herrick's manner with her, which successfully banished sentiment to the background of their relationship.

The afternoon of the fourth day of his residence in the new quarters found Philip's typewriter going so fast that it seemed as if it were running away with the author who sat behind it. It was one of those "good" days that come to everyone once in a while when the atmosphere is charged with ideas and the right word or phrase is always on the tip of the tongue ready to be used. A writer is more prone to have good or bad working days than most people. An individual worker, he is no part of a crew that will drag him along when his initiative is below par or hold him back when he is tapping reserve batteries of energy.

That very morning had brought him two things which tended to make his outlook on life interesting and cheerful. One was the establishment of friendly and financial relations with the editor of one of the popular-priced fiction magazines who had bought an old manuscript of his and asked for more in the same vein. The price he received was what he had always imagined fiction writers received, divided by eight. At that rate he figured that he could barely make a living if he wrote every minute of the time he was awake. Still it was a start in the right direction and he promised himself that he would get even with the publishing world by the prices he would demand when his name was a household word. Every author indulges in that sort of dreaming, — the advantage that his job has over that of a bricklayer, which usually pays better.

The other event of importance of the

morning had been the arrival of the mail. Philip had not been established long enough in the new quarters for any of his old friends to know his address, so his curiosity had been aroused by the presence of a letter among the circulars which always greet a new tenant in an apartment building. The envelope bore the return card of Doctor Allen whom he had notified of his homecoming, but it was written in long hand and the doctor's correspondence was always typewritten. The handwriting was reminiscent but he failed to place it until he glanced at the letter itself which began:

My Dear Mr. Smith: —

Dr. Allen tells me that you have come home permanently cured. Will you believe that I am very glad? I know that with returning health you will find success in your chosen field.

As an invalid I suppose it did not much

matter whether you were married or not but now that you are on the road to recovery it is not fair to hamper your career with a "wished on" wife. Therefore I shall make the arrangements for our divorce. It will take some little time as I shall have to sue on the grounds of desertion and I cannot do that in this state, but you may have absolute liberty as soon as possible.

I am glad that we have been of so much benefit to each other and as I shall have no further occasion to communicate with you, permit me to thank you again for being such a nice husband.

Yours sincerely,
Mary Smith.

He was to be free, — his life was returned to him with a future all his own, — every path to choose from, no avenue closed to him either socially or in the line of his profession.

No wonder, then, that the typewriter raced away, putting in form the hap-

piness that sang in his brain. Under such conditions why shouldn't he write until all the blank paper in the world was covered with words saleable at a price varying from half a cent to ten cents apiece?

"Ding-a-ling-a-ling!" interrupted the telephone.

"Damn!" said the author, breaking off in the midst of an elaborate twenty-cent sentence.

"Can Marian and I come in for a minute?" asked Jack over the 'phone.

At first he was tempted to send them away without seeing them; then he remembered how kind these two had been when he had no other friends, and invited them up. Usually Marian had never come except when he was in the mood to be interrupted.

"Don't look cross," she admonished, smiling her most engaging smile. "We're

only going to stop a minute. I can tell by the feel of the air in this room that the work is going splendidly, but I thought you wouldn't mind knocking off a minute for the pleasure of bidding me good-bye."

"I can't see that bidding you good-bye is any pleasure at all," replied Philip.

"For which she said 'Thank you.'" Marian dropped him a mock curtesy.

"Incidentally," Jack broke in, "I've brought you several pictures to make the place look a little more real. I regret that most of them are things that I have done myself. Do you mind if I put them up?"

"I should say not. I was wondering what I could do to liven up this wall-paper. Thanks."

Jack discovered a hammer and some nails in the kitchenette and made a tour of the room, sticking up line drawings and water colors here and there

with nonchalant disregard for that clause in Philip's lease which specified that "no nails or tacks shall be driven into the walls."

"Now," demanded Philip, when Jack was started on his self-imposed task, "explain about this 'good-bye' business. Where are you going and why don't you take us along?"

"I'm going to visit relatives in Boston and I believe that also answers your second question as to why I don't take you along. It's bad enough to visit one's own relatives without involving yourself in anyone else's. I'm a black sheep in our family but I have to go back once a year to show the rest of them that 'the life I am leading' as they call it, has not yet ruined my face and my figure. Some year my mirror is going to forbid my return; then they'll have to look me up to learn the truth."

"The trip accounts for the new uniform, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Thanks for noticing. Do you like it?"

She turned slowly for his inspection. Her dress was a dull green velvet, edged with black fur. Simple in design as all her costumes were, it fitted with the smoothness of a fine leather book-binding. A narrow line of the fur around the low, square-cut collar of the dress emphasized the ivory of her neck, and with her dark hair framed the dusky, healthy beauty of her face. Her cheeks dull red from the brisk walk she had just taken in the early fall air, she might have passed for the personification of autumn.

"It's a corker," admitted Philip, with frank admiration. "You look as if you might be a pleasant dream being had by the Czar of Russia."

"A trifle involved, but still understood."

"Hand me that hammer, will you," said Jack from a chair, "before I swallow this nail."

"Certainly," Philip did as requested, "although as far as that goes we have plenty more nails."

"Tell me, if you don't mind," suggested Marian, "what you are so happy about."

"Do I seem oppressively cheerful?"

"Yes, and I want to be in on it. Goodness knows I need something to brighten up life among the relatives."

"I've been getting along well with my writing."

"Is that all?" she searched his face. "No, it isn't."

He admitted that she was right.

"My wife is getting a divorce." He smiled at the idea of being cheerful at such a comic-weekly situation.

Marian looked at him with an added sparkle in her eye.

"I am about to be returned to the circulating library," added Philip, recalling a figure he had used when they first met. "Apparently I am not very interesting reading. I'm wondering if anyone else will care to take me out."

"I'm glad you are free," Marian said simply. A sudden constraint had come over her and she dropped her glance like a schoolgirl.

Philip took a step toward her and raised her hand in his own. The touch of her fingers sent a compelling thrill through him.

"So am I," he said in a low tone, "because now I can —"

"All finished for the time being," announced Jack, dropping the hammer to attract attention. "Pardon me for breaking up this John Drew scene, but we'll have to leave if you're going to catch the Boston express."

"When will you be back?" asked Philip, an eager light in his eyes.

"Soon," Marian replied.

"I'll take dinner with you when I've put Marian on the train," Jack suggested, looking at his watch.

"Yes, — call here for me. We'll be lonesome together."

"Thanks for the compliment." Marian stood at the door, a picture of vivid life and color. "Please miss me a lot," she smiled wistfully, then added, "both of you."

CHAPTER VIII

IS NOT LARGE ENOUGH FOR TWO

WHEN they were gone he returned to his typewriter and wrote a single sentence, then laughed. What was the use of trying to arouse enthusiasm about a paper and ink heroine when a creature like that had stood within two feet of him, begging him with eyes and lips and soul to take her in his arms? After all, literature was pretty thin stuff when you turned the limelight on it and compared it to flesh and blood.

He closed the machine. There was no use trying to do more that day. You can't write "he said" and "she murmured softly" when you are thinking of a kiss you almost had.

There was one thing he could do. He had not told her yet that he loved her and he would write it. Setting the typewriter one side he got out a pen and prepared to compose the first love-letter he had written since he was a youth. Somehow it didn't come as easily as it had when he was seventeen and had felt undying passion for a college girl of twenty.

At the end of an hour he had destroyed half a dozen sheets of paper and sat with the note half completed, staring out across the house-tops to the river, over which a fog was creeping as the evening began to come on.

There was a rap at the door,—Jack returning for dinner probably. Philip shouted "Come in," and returned to his search for ideas among the house-tops of New York.

After a moment he asked, "Where'll we eat?"

There was no answer. Philip turned toward the door.

It stood open, and in its frame, softly illumined by the fading light of day, was a picture from a European guide-book. It was a girl, and after a hasty glance at her garments Philip decided that no one could be loose in New York dressed that way except an emigrant just released from Ellis Island. The bodice of laced blue velvet over a very full, short skirt, a varicolored shawl and a cloth head-dress instead of a hat over her flaxen hair reminded him of the peasant chorus of a grand opera. The feet were even more unmistakable. At the ends of white-stockinged legs they were encased in a pair of very heavy, wooden-soled shoes.

She was really very tiny after you discounted the voluminous clothing and her face had the wide-eyed trustfulness of a child's. Yet from the length of her skirts

and the way her hair was done up on her head it was evident that she, or someone, thought she was a grown woman. The general impression she gave was that of somebody's little girl who has dressed up in mother's clothes.

Swallowing his astonishment, Philip motioned her in and asked politely, "What can I do for you?"

She came forward a few steps, making a racket thereby like dropping an armful of stove-wood into a box and said, "Das versteh' ich nicht. Ich habe kein Englisch."

"You don't understand?" he repeated in English. "You've got nothing on me. All the German I know is locked away with my college diploma. What are we going to do about it?"

The German girl apparently took this as an invitation to stay because she advanced several feet further into the room.

"Ich suche eine Stelle."

"Her name is Stella," murmured the author, "but I can't make out the rest of it."

The hall-boy from below entered the open door with breathless haste. Strangely enough in an ocean of colored hall-boys he was a white island, a freckled one at that, with the build of a jockey and the alertness of a bantam.

"Aw, there you are," he exclaimed to the girl, then turning to Philip he explained apologetically, "I stepped out for a minute and she got in the main entrance without me seeing her and run upstairs. I been looking for her on every floor. Servants ain't allowed to come in that way. You'll have to tell her."

"She's not my servant," denied Philip, "and I can't tell her anything because she doesn't understand English."

"Oh! She looks Dutch, don't she?"

The girl turned an uncomprehending gaze from one to the other of them as they spoke, and smiled encouragingly on both as if everything they said was a personal compliment.

"Do you speak any German?" inquired Philip of the boy.

"Sure, — my folks is Dutch and we speak it a lot at home."

"Then ask her what it is she wants."

"All right. I'll try her out." The boy turned to the doll-like creature and spoke rapidly. "Sagen Sie mir was Sie wünschen."

The girl's face lighted up with the first look of intelligence she had displayed since her arrival. She laughed like a pleased baby.

"Ich suche eine Stelle."

The boy translated to Philip, "She wants a job as maid."

"Well, I certainly hope she gets it."

"She means she wants to work for you, boss."

The girl made an apparently unsuccessful attempt to read in their faces what they were talking about.

"I haven't any more use for a maid than I have for a wooden-legged kangaroo. You tell her I can't pay for any help."

The boy put that in German.

This let loose a perfect torrent of language from the seeker after employment which ended up in a flood of tears.

"Why did you threaten to strike her?" demanded Philip.

"I didn't, boss, so help me. Honest, I just told her what you said and she said she didn't care about the pay. She's up against it, says she just arrived from Germany all alone. Her folks are all dead and she doesn't know what to do or where to go."

"Poor kid. No wonder it makes her weep. She's rather pretty too, isn't she?" Philip cast an appraising glance at the tear-stained face. She was little more than a baby, he thought. "But look at those feet. There is no danger of her ever losing her balance, is there?"

The intruder wiped away a tear with a corner of her apron and smiled once more a timid, ingratiating smile.

"Mir gefällt er," she declared to the boy. "Er ist ein so schmucker Herr," then cast down her eyes shyly.

"What was that?" Philip demanded.

"She says that she likes you because you are so handsome."

"She is a very discerning young person, isn't she? However I can't give her a job even if I am beautiful."

"Hier ist es schön." The girl laid aside her shawl. "Kann ich gleich anfangen?"

"She thinks this is a nice place,"

translated the hall-boy, "and she wants to go to work right now."

"No, no," protested Philip in alarm. "It won't do. She mustn't stay here. She'll have to hunt up some place to stay to-night; then to-morrow she'll get a job all right."

"Was meinte er?" The puzzled foreigner appealed to her interpreter.

"She wants to know what you're saying. I guess I'd better tell her that you can't give her a job." He turned to the girl. "Er kann Ihnen keine Arbeit geben."

She burst into tears again.

"Ich weiss nicht, wo ich hin soll," she sobbed.

"What's that?" Philip inquired anxiously.

"She has no place to go."

"Ask her if she has any money?"

"Haben Sie Geld?"

The girl stopped crying long enough to murmur, "Nur wenig," and opened her tightly-clenched fist to show a few pieces of copper money which she apparently had carried all the way across the Atlantic in that manner.

"That isn't very much to begin a career on, is it?" Philip was thinking how hostile New York could be to the penniless stranger within her gates. "We can't turn her out into the street without money enough for a bed and breakfast. Here —" He took from his pocket a small roll from which he extracted a five-dollar bill and handed it to her.

She put it back in his hand with an engaging smile.

"Erst nach ein paar Wochen will ich den Lohn."

Philip looked inquiringly at the interpreter, who by this time had become so interested in the game that

he had forgotten his duties in the hall below.

"She says not to pay her until she has worked for you a couple of weeks."

"Poor beautiful idiot," commiserated Philip. "I suppose she doesn't understand that I am giving her this to get rid of her. God knows that face will haunt me for months, — and those feet. I feel like a criminal to turn her out to the mercy of the street, but I can't do anything for her. It's like striking a baby in the face but I've got to do it."

He took her firmly by the arm and led her unresistingly to the door, amid the clatter of wooden shoes. He held the portal wide open suggestively.

"If only she wouldn't smile so idiotically, as if I were doing her a favor. She's like a doll with the expression painted on. Here —" he placed the bill firmly in her hand — "nehmen Sie this — take it — in

German or English as you like, and go, — gehe — vamoose — exit — scat!" He gave her a gentle push toward the hall.

"Er will mich nicht," she inquired, in pathetic tones. "Ich sollte eigentlich fort?"

"Ja." Then to Philip the boy said, "I'll go with her and put her out."

He took the girl by the hand and led her away.

Philip closed the door but he did not succeed in shutting out her presence because for a full minute he heard the "clump — clump" of those wooden-soled shoes on the stairs and every "clump" reminded him of the pathetic little figure going out so inadequately equipped to do battle with the city.

Once he started to go after her to call her back, impelled by the thought of her helplessness in a strange city, but he

turned back. What could he do to help her? Perhaps she would meet someone who could do more than he toward placing her in the way of employment.

The clatter of the wooden shoes grew fainter, then died away entirely. Almost immediately there was the sound of an automobile engine being started in the street below. Maybe, thought Philip, her fairy godmother had met her in the street and had turned one of her shoes into a motor car — it was big enough, — and now she was being whirled away like Cinderella going to the ball in her pumpkin coach.

CHAPTER IX

NOT EVEN IF ONE IS A VERY SMALL GIRL

HE turned on the lights and went back to his desk. The unfinished letter to Marian lay face up before him. He read it through and pushed it aside. That could wait until to-morrow.

Under cover of darkness a storm had been creeping stealthily over the city and now with a few preliminary crashes of artillery started a fusillade of rain that beat gustily at the windows. It was one of those sullen autumn storms in which the elements seem out of temper, snarling and hissing at the world and every once in a while when their rage is sufficiently worked up, shooting out cruel, forked tongues of light that deal destruction where they touch.

It was pretty hard luck for the emigrant girl, thought Philip, to be out alone and homeless in such weather. Probably by this time, however, she was under shelter. It was lucky he had given her that five dollars. He would forget all about her. A man couldn't carry the burdens of every helpless vagrant he came in contact with. Still, that trusting face with its ingratiating smile refused to be driven out of his mind. But why should he care? He, Philip Smith, had not been appointed guardian of all the emigrant girls in the world. She would have to look out for herself.

He looked at his watch, a dollar affair, and because the hands stood at eight o'clock he estimated that it must be about six. It gained regularly four hours a day and he had set it in the morning. After you got used to the mathematics of the thing you could tell the hour by it just as

well as by a full-jeweled repeater. Anyway it was time for Jack to return for the evening meal. Philip left the desk and dressed for dinner. This was not so elaborate a process as you might suppose, consisting as it did of washing his hands and face and putting on a clean collar and his other tie.

The storm outside put on a few extra flourishes in the way of thunder and lightning. The whole world reverberated and jarred in sympathy. Owing to that Philip did not at first hear the rapping at his door. It was repeated insistently.

At last in a lull it caught his ear and he shouted, "Come in."

The door opened slowly.

For a ten-second interval Philip gazed in helpless amazement at his visitor while her clothes, absolutely soaked through, dripped tiny puddles on the floor.

"Great Scott, you again!" he finally ejaculated.

"Ja," she answered, evidently interpreting his tones if not his words. "Das Geld habe ich verloren, da fing's an zu regnen; ich wusste nicht wo ich hin sollte; so bin ich zu Ihnen zurückgekommen. Sie sehen ja so freundlich aus!"

"Yes, of course," returned Philip, feeling that he was called upon to say something in the interval, "in some respects you are right, although there is a good deal to be said on the other side."

She started to smile at him uncomprehendingly but an extra loud crash of thunder changed her expression to one of terror and dropping to her knees she hastily murmured a jargon which must have been a German prayer. She was evidently rushing it through in order to get her petition on file before the elements cut loose again.

"The poor kid is frightened," said Philip to himself. "I wonder if they don't have thunder in Germany. They haven't needed any since Wagner's time. She's so wet I suppose she'll catch cold, too." He held out his hand toward her. "Come here," he commanded.

She looked up.

He repeated more loudly as if that would make any difference in her understanding. "Come here!" He motioned her toward him.

She scrambled to her feet hastily and came to him, cringing a little as if she expected him to strike her.

"Where is your money?" he asked sternly.

"What's German for money?" he asked himself. "I remember, — Geld. Where is Geld?"

A beatific smile broke over her anxious features and she held up a small piece of

the five-dollar bill which was firmly clenched in her hands. The rest of it had been torn off.

Philip examined it.

"What happened to the rest of it?" he asked, then muttered to himself, "Why can't I remember a couple of German words?"

He went through the motions of tearing up the bill and throwing it away, looking at her inquiringly.

The girl laughed and shook her head.

"Nein, nein. Ein kleines grünes Kätzchen hat es gefressen."

"Wait a minute," Philip stopped her. "I almost understood part of that. What did you say?"

She understood and repeated slowly. "Ein kleines —"

"A little," he translated.

"Grünes —"

"A little green —"

"Kätzchen —"

"Kitten. A little green kitten —"

"Hat es —"

"Has it —"

"Gefressen." She looked at him anxiously to see if he comprehended.

He shook his head.

"I can't get that 'gefressen' thing."

"Gefressen, gefressen," she reiterated, going through the motions of chewing and swallowing. "Gefressen."

"Eating. I understand. A little green kitten has it eaten. I wonder if you are kidding me in German. A little green kitten has eaten my five dollars. There's something wrong with my German somewhere."

A crash of thunder brought the girl to her knees again. He took her hand and raised her gently.

"It's all right," he said, soothingly. "Don't be scared. Uncle Dudley will protect you. You can stay here until the

storm is over. Then I'll find you a place to sleep until you get a job. We must first change your clothes. I don't know how we are going to do it without being a fairy queen, but you're so wet we've got to do something." He led her to the rocking chair. "Sit down." He motioned her to take a seat.

She did so, regarding her benefactor with childlike interest.

"First let's get these off." He knelt at her feet and unfastened the heavy shoes. Taking one of them off he held it up. "Your education may as well begin right now!" Pointing to the shoe he repeated slowly and with emphasis, "Shoe, — shoe, — shoe."

She smiled with quick comprehension.

"Choo, — choo, — choo," she said.

"No, this isn't a railroad train. Listen." He spoke more deliberately and more loudly each time. "Shoe,—shoe,—shoe."

She imitated him as closely as possible, also shouting louder on each repetition, "Choo, — choo, — choo."

"The train is approaching. Very fair imitation without props."

He started to take off her other boot. "Great Scott, look at what was inside of this." He held up a very tiny foot enclosed in a floppy, wet, white stocking. "You seem to have shrunk since you got wet."

She laughed and cooed, "Choo—choo—choo."

"She learns quickly," said Philip, chiefly to himself. "I wonder if I could teach her to say 'I love you'?"

"I — love — you," repeated the girl slowly.

"No, no, you mustn't." He was kneeling in front of her, struggling with a refractory knot in the piece of string which was doing substitute duty for a shoe-lace.

"It's funny how easy it is to teach a woman to say that. Before we go any further suppose you tell me what your name is. Listen. What is your name?"

The girl looked anxiously in his face but remained dumb.

He pointed to her. "Name — name — name."

She repeated carefully, "Name — name — name."

"No, wait." He pointed to himself and said distinctly, "Philip Smith."

She made the same gesture toward herself and said, "Philip Smith."

"No, no. Me Philip Smith, — you what?"

"Ach!" Her face wreathed in smiles. "Mein Name ist Sophia Abendthaler."

"Sophia Abendthaler. It ain't possible. You got that name where you bought those shoes. We've got to have some name that fits you with the shoes off." He

thought a moment and then said, impressively, "Your name is Molly, — Molly, — Molly!"

She laughed. "Mein Name ist Molly-mollymolly. Und Sie, — Sie sind Uncle Sam."

"No, — Philip Smith."

"Nein, — Uncle Sam."

"Have it your own way. I suppose that is the only English name you know. I'll be Uncle Sam." He drew off the shoe and placed it beside the first.

"Soll ich mir die Strümpfe ausziehen?" she inquired.

"I don't get you, but whatever you say is all right."

She repeated her question, indicating her stockings.

"Oh yes. I suppose you'll have to. I'll turn my back."

He examined one of the new pictures

on the wall until she said "Fertig," then returned to find her wiggling two sets of tiny pink toes.

"Das is der Daumen," she indicated a big toe, "der schüttelte die Pflaumen—"

"I know that. This little pig went to market." She laughed. He removed the head-dress from her hair and the shawl from her shoulders.

She stood and started to take off her skirt.

"Just a minute. Before we go any further let's find something to put on after you get that off."

He went to the tiny closet which contained his wardrobe and brought a gaudy, warm-looking dressing-gown and from his trunk he produced a suit of pajamas.

"This is the best I can do for a lady," he apologized. "You can put them on in the bathroom and we'll try to dry out your own clothes before you leave."

He led her to the bathroom and handed her the things. She nodded and smiled brightly to show that she understood and went in.

Philip returned to the rocking-chair and spread out the wet shawl, head-dress and stockings. The heavy shoes he picked up and examined curiously, then thoughtfully let one of them drop to the floor with a loud thump.

"Cinderella," he murmured.

CHAPTER X

SO THE GIRL WILL HAVE TO LEAVE

THERE was a rap at the door. Jack, of course, — he had forgotten about him. Philip grabbed the clothes with one arm and threw them into the kitchenette, picked up a pipe, sat down and started to light it.

"Come in."

"All ready?" queried Jack briskly. "It's raining pitchforks out to-night so let's eat in the café downstairs."

"All right," assented Philip. "Suppose you go down and order for me. I'll be down in a minute."

"There's no hurry. I'll wait until you wash up."

"It isn't a question of washing. I've got a letter to write."

"Go ahead, then. I'll wash up a bit myself while you're doing it." Jack started for the bathroom.

"Just a minute, — don't go in there."

"Why not?"

"I've got some negatives developing in there and if you open the door they'll be light-struck."

"Oh, I didn't know that you were interested in photography."

"Yes, extensively. You can order a steak for me and whatever vegetables sound interesting."

He took his friend by the arm and was about to lead him to the hall when the bathroom door opened and the emigrant girl stood gazing in startled surprise at the strange man. She was an unexpected picture, herself, even to Philip, who had seen the pajamas and dressing-gown before.

The legs and arms of the pajamas had been constructed to cover about six feet

and a half of man and lapped over considerably on the five-foot occupant. The dressing-gown, too, of generous proportions, made her look as if a circus tent had collapsed over her.

After the first shock of surprise was over, the girl dropped a curtesy and smiled.

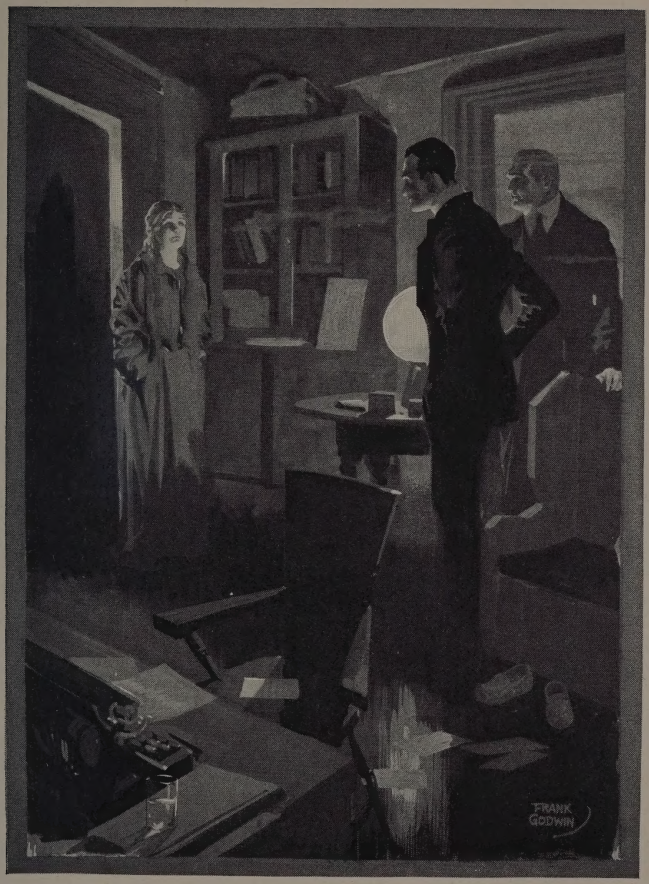
"As a photographer, Phil," said Jack, *sotto voce*, "you're a great success."

"You might as well know the truth," said Philip. "This is a girl."

"I am astonished at your frankness."

"After I present you I'll tell you about her." He took the girl by the arm and led her down the steps. "Molly, this is Mr. Herrick."

She started to give him her hand, discovered that it was covered by the dangling end of a sleeve and laughed. She held it out mutely to Philip to be fixed. He rolled back the cuff.



"As a photographer, Phil," said Jack, sotto voce, "you're a great success."

She gravely shook hands with the artist.

"How do you do?" murmured Jack, deeply mystified.

"Wie geht's, Herr Herrick, du kleiner Schelm?"

"What did she say?

"Don't you understand German?"

"Not a word. I can worry along in French but German is beyond me."

"That makes it a good deal easier for me to translate what she says to you. Just then she remarked that her great uncle who was shot wore a suit just like the one you've got on."

"I don't believe she said that."

"I assure you," said Philip gravely, "that what I said is as near an exact translation of her speech as it is possible for me to give. Of course you understand the German language is more flexible than ours and it is impossible to get the shades of meaning in the English equivalent."

"Oh. Now supposing you tell me what it is all about." Then seeing from Philip's eye that he was casting about in his mind for an explanation, Jack went on, "You might just as well tell the truth because I'll believe it's a lie anyway and you can save your imaginative faculties for your stories."

"You wrong me because I wouldn't waste fiction on a person of your caliber. The absolute truth of the matter is that she is a girl you adopted when you were abroad this summer and when she arrived this afternoon you weren't home so I took her in and gave her some dry clothes to wear until you came."

Having ordered dinner to be sent up to the apartment from the café downstairs, Philip formed the party into a ways and means committee to provide for Molly's future. After telling Jack how she really had arrived and showing him the wet

garments and the wooden-soled shoes as proof of his statements, he seemed to consider that Jack was as much involved in her welfare as himself.

"But I don't see," protested the artist, "why it is any of our affair."

"I didn't either until she came back the second time. After you've let her look at you for half an hour with those trustful, baby eyes of hers you'll feel different about it. We've simply got to find a home for her."

"You talk as if she were a kitten you had found out on the sidewalk. Why not advertise, 'Wanted, a home for a small, strong, German girl, answers to the name of "Molly," very playful, fond of children, color, white and pink except for dark smudge of coal soot on nose.'"

The girl, unnoticed by the two men, gave a slight start and raised her hand an inch from the arm of the chair in which

she was sitting, then with an effort controlled the movement and rested her hand in its former position.

"But she hasn't any soot mark on her nose." Philip examined her face carefully and with evident pleasure.

"No, but we could put one on and it makes her description sound more complete." He produced a pipe from his coat pocket.

"Did you notice the scar on her cheek, though?" said Philip, continuing his scrutiny. "If anything it makes her look prettier, I think. Do you know, Jack, she knows I am talking about her just the way a dog does when you praise it. Look at the way she is blushing. She's a picture!"

"If you don't look below the head, yes. I never suspected you having such bad taste in pajamas. That striped pattern looks as if it had been picked out by a

blind Bulgarian who didn't even hear very well."

"Can you beat her, sitting there grinning like a cat while we're guying her? It's lucky she doesn't understand English. Look at her, Jack, — can't you almost see a ray of intelligence in that face? Am I enthusiastic because she is pretty or does she look to you as if she might have a little sense?"

"I think I can detect a sort of a bright look once in a while. We'll put that in the advertisement. It may help to dispose of her." Jack paused in the act of striking a match. "Ask her if she objects to my pipe, will you, Phil?"

Philip hesitated a moment and then said forcefully, "Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten dass ich so traurig bin."

"Gee, you do speak German, don't you!" Jack was wide eyed with admiration.

"Oh, a little," admitted Philip modestly, wondering if he could remember the words of any more German college songs.

Molly looked at Philip inquiringly, "Was sagen Sie?"

Philip soberly repeated once more the first two lines of "Die Lorelei." To his astonishment the girl smiled and replied gravely, "Ein kleiner roter Elefant kommt sich ohne alle andern roten Elefanten gar zu einsam vor."

"What did she say?"

"I don't like to tell you for fear it may hurt your feelings."

"Go ahead, — I don't mind."

"She said she doesn't mind a good pipe and regular tobacco but she doesn't care for the smell of burning cabbage."

"But that's what you always say about this mixture, yourself. She didn't say that."

"Sure she did. I think she and I agree on a great many things. I wish Marian

were here. She'd know what to do with her."

"You bet she would," Jack grumbled, putting his pipe back in his pocket. "She'd give the girl a meal of ground glass and a nice place to expire in."

"What makes you say that?" demanded Philip.

"Because Marian doesn't like to have any other woman around the man she is interested in and just now she regards you as her property. Savvy? I've known her ten years and I never saw her so much in love before in all that time. As the proverb says 'A word to the wise never does any good.'"

The waiter from the café arrived at that moment with a trayful of covered dishes containing the dinner and Philip assisted him in getting things on the table. The waiter seemed mildly interested in the voluminously clad figure in the dress-

ing-gown but Philip volunteered no explanation and he asked no questions.

When they were alone again Philip motioned his guests to the table. "Dinner is served, Mademoiselle and Monsieur," he announced and drew back a chair for the girl. "I wonder if she eats with her fingers. Probably she does, so don't be surprised. No, by George, I see a light of understanding in her eye when she sees a knife. It's all right, she is going to eat with her knife. That suggests dangerous possibilities, however, if she isn't very skillful. Will you serve the stuff, Jack, while I fix her out with all the protection we have?"

Philip unfolded a napkin and tied it securely around the girl's neck, bib fashion.

"Did you ever see anything like this girl's hair?" he queried, standing in back looking down upon her as he tied the napkin. "Nothing but fine, soft gold and it's

clean too. You won't find hair like that on an American girl."

"I admit she is pretty," Jack concurred, "but that's no excuse for neglecting your dinner. Sit down and follow the example of your adopted white elephant."

Molly was busily eating the lump sugar out of the bowl as fast as she could gobble it.

"Here — here — here, Molly, stop!" ejaculated Philip sternly, catching her arm in mid-air as she reached for a lump. "You mustn't!" He shook his head at her and slapped her wrists gently. "No, no, nein — nein."

She looked at him gravely with a hurt expression. "Hätte ich das nicht gesollt?"

"She says 'Pass the bread,'" Philip translated recklessly.

"All right, but she has two pieces already."

Molly improved the shining moments

between conversation by cramming food into her mouth with her knife. She was not so skillful at this handy method of eating as she might have been and the result was highly ornamental to that portion of her face immediately adjacent to her lips.

"I hate to contemplate the result when she tackles the blueberry pie," murmured the host, horribly fascinated by the girl's unsuccessful attempts to mar her beauty.

"She's a lot prettier than any K. M. I ever saw," Jack commented, the artist in him rising to an appreciation of her fine points. "Her face isn't classic or even pure in outline but it is interesting. I didn't know Germans ever had pug noses, though."

"Halt, man," commanded Philip, "how can you call anything about her 'pug'? Her nose may be tip-tilted just a wee bit

like a rosebud turning itself up for a draught of morning dew but —"

"Say no more. I take back what I said; I am overwhelmed with similes. A nose by any other name would smell the same. Tell her I think she is pretty."

"I seem to be a third party to a rather desperate flirtation. Well, here goes." He gravely fixed Molly with his eye and soberly stated, "Ach, du lieber, lieber, ach, du lieber, lieber, ein, zwei, drei, vier, fünf."

Just as gravely the girl replied, "Sehen Sie doch den schwarzen Hund! Er jagt die gelbe Katze. Katze kann ich schon buchstabieren; K–A–T."

"Ja, ja," Philip murmured, nodding his head as if he understood. "She says she thanks you very much but wants to warn you that she is married already and has three husbands now living in Germany. Look," he ejaculated in mock consterna-

tion, "see what she is doing with that pie. Is there a doctor in the building if she should cut herself?"

Molly was absorbed in the difficult feat of getting a strip of pie an inch wide and about three inches long into her mouth without dropping it. She succeeded at last and all drew a breath of relief.

"She won't cut herself," assured Jack. "My grandfather ate with his knife all his life and he's ninety-four now."

"You can get statistics to prove anything. But don't spring a joke even in English. If she should laugh now I hate to think of the consequences."

When the meal was over and Philip had removed the last trace of blueberry pie from Molly's cheeks the waiter took away the dishes.

"As it is still raining," said Philip, glancing out of the window at the storm which

was raging lustily, "I wish we could get her a place to stay for the night somewhere in the building. I hate to think of sending her out into the wet."

"Why don't you ask the hall-boy? He'll know if there are any vacant servants' quarters available."

The hall-boy informed Philip over the telephone that servants' quarters were to be had but there would be no room ready for occupancy before the next day. He added, however, that there was a cheap boarding-house in the next block where they might take care of her.

"That will have to do," decided Philip. "Will you stay here with her, Jack, and see that she gets back into her own clothes while I go around there and make arrangements?"

"Me stay here?" questioned Jack in alarm. "Nothing doing. I wouldn't know how to tell her anything. You

understand what she says, so you stay here and I'll go and rent the room."

That arrangement did not annoy Philip as much as he pretended it did because it saved him the necessity of going out in the rain, so Jack set forth in search of lodging for the night.

The elements were apparently waiting for him to come out because he had no sooner left than pandemonium let loose. In Philip's apartment the windows banged and rattled viciously as if some malignant witch were outside trying to get in.

Philip, looking out over the city to see signs of a clearing sky, turned away after a particularly blinding flash of lightning to console the little German girl.

She was nowhere to be seen. Apparently the room was empty.

"Where are you?" shouted Philip. "Molly! Molly!"

"Ja," came a voice from somewhere, "Hier, Uncle Sam."

He looked all around before his eyes fell on a face peering out from under the table.

"Come out of there, you. What's the matter?"

He took her hand and half pulled her out from her shelter. At another crash of thunder she started, however, and scrambled back.

"Are you afraid of thunder?" He pointed outside.

She nodded vigorously.

"It can't hurt you, Molly." He helped her out and stood her on her feet. "I know just how you feel, though, because I used to be afraid of thunder, too, when I was a kid. Whenever it stormed I would run to my mother and she'd take me in her arms and rock me and tell me fairy stories until I'd forget all about it."

Molly went to the sideboard from which she took eight glasses. These she placed on the floor, much to the mystification of Philip.

"She's a Japanese juggler," he murmured to himself, "and this is one of her tricks."

Molly took two of the dining-room chairs and placed their legs in the glasses. Then she sat on one of them and curled her feet up under her, a pose suggestive of the discomfort of a Chinese god.

"I remember," commented the man, "my grandmother used to do that stunt. The glass is supposed to be a non-conductor so if you keep your feet off the floor you are safe from lightning."

Molly motioned toward the other chair.

"Uncle Sam, bitte, sitzen Sie sich!"

"All right." He sat beside her. "You want to save me from the general destruction do you? I don't know whether I can do that trick with my feet though."

"Choo, — choo, — choo, Uncle Sam, I love you," softly whispered Molly, getting rid of all her English at once. "Singen sie mir doch was vor!"

"What did you say?"

"Singen Sie!"

"Sing?"

"Ja."

"I can't."

"Bitte, Uncle Sam, I love you!"

"She doesn't know what she is saying," Philip commented aloud. "I guess she means it as much as most women do, at that."

Molly put her hand confidingly in his. "Bitte!"

"Your hand is like a baby's — and I turned you out into the street. Thank God, you came back."

"Danke schön." She looked up at him expectantly.

"I can't sing. Honest to goodness, my

education was neglected in that branch, but I'll tell you a story and after that you can dress and I'll take you to a boarding-house. It won't have to be a very good story because you won't understand it anyway. Here follows The Strange Tale of the Baldheaded Mermaid."

CHAPTER XI

THE STRANGE TALE OF THE BALDHEADED MERMAID

ONCE upon a time there was a mermaid by the name of Estelle who had been entirely bald from birth. Never upon the shiny roof of her alleged intellect had there sprouted a single follicle. Tresses shunned the slippery surface of her head as too insecure a place to roost.

Aside from this defect Estelle's beauty was as great as that of one of the heroines Elinor Glyn describes so well after eating a peck of catnip. By that you are supposed to infer that she had a figure that would have made her unpopular with women anywhere in the world. Her face, too, was one that would have obtained her a position on

one of Ziegfeld's choruses any day. It's an open question, of course, whether Ziegfeld ever noticed that ladies have faces.

When Estelle was a mere tadpole, so to speak, and after that, when she was a frisky tomboy, it didn't make much difference whether she had hair or not. In some ways it was an advantage. She could get dressed quicker than her sisters, who always had to spend hours on their coiffures before they could do anything amusing. As far as Estelle was concerned getting up consisted of opening both eyes and putting on a fresh pleasant smile. Then she was ready for the day. Her father, Neptune, who was incidentally the parent of several hundred thousand other mermaids, was especially nice to her. One reason for that was because she was the only one of his daughters he could be reasonably sure of the name of. The rest looked more or less alike but there is no

mistaking a baldheaded mermaid, as you must admit if you've ever seen one.

Neptune allowed her to have a catfish and a dogfish for pets. The catfish was named Tom, although it wasn't really that kind of a cat at all, and the dogfish would come when you whistled, which is hard to do under water, as you know. Tom and the dogfish quarrelled a great deal and it was a very tame evening which didn't end by Neptune's kicking them both out of doors. Tom also got into the annoying habit of having kittens every month or so. This used to break Estelle's heart because her father wouldn't let her keep them but insisted on tying stones around their necks and drowning them. After a batch of Tommy's offspring had thus perished, Estelle always cried herself to sleep but nobody ever knew it as the water was salty, anyway.

But when she grew up into young mer-

maidenhood her troubles began in earnest. The business of mermaids in general is to sit on rocks and sing and comb their hair until some sailor leaves his ship and comes to them. Now Estelle had a voice like the music of wind bells in a gentle breeze and she could sit on a rock as well as anybody. But when it came to combing the hair Estelle simply was not there. Not but what she had plenty of combs. One of her aunts absentmindedly gave her a beautiful tortoise-shell one, every Christmas. But there was nothing to comb. Sailors would hear her singing on a rock and leave their ships to come to her and then, when they'd get a glimpse of that vacant sky-piece glistening in the moonlight, they'd laugh and swim right back to their ships.

As a siren Estelle left too much to the imagination.

The real tragedy of Estelle's baldness

lay in the fact that she fell desperately in love with a young Triton. He was quite the most popular Triton in her part of the ocean and all the mermaids adored him and set their caps for him. It will give you an idea of how handsome he was when I tell you his name was Herbert and he looked the part. To Estelle he paid no attention whatever except to swear occasionally when he found her lying across his doorstep in the morning when he got up. No matter how ingratiatingly she smiled at him and wagged her tail he brushed by her as if she had been a mere dogfish.

In common with everyone else in the world who is bald, Estelle was the recipient of a great deal of advice. One friend advised electric treatments and for weeks Estelle rubbed her head on the Atlantic cable. Another said she had heard that going bareheaded in the sun would grow hair and after that every bright day found

Estelle roosting on the beach until her pretty pink and white skin turned a bright angry red and then a rich mahogany shade. But the down failed to materialize and one day when she woke up from an afternoon nap and found an ostrich vainly trying to hatch something out of her egg-shaped cranium, she gave it up and spent a week in the cool, coral caves at the bottom of the ocean, thoughtfully peeling herself.

Then came Estelle's deliverance. One day she was swimming along beside a great ocean liner, attempting to entice the captain, who stood on the bridge, to jump overboard. The captain did not notice her. Neither did any of the other men on board. The reason was because there was an atrociously beautiful woman on the ship. Her skin was almost as beautiful as Estelle's and she wore the stunningest clothes she could get in Paris. But her

chiefest charm lay in her hair. It was bright, shiny gold, wonderfully done up in curls and ringlets and braids and pompadours. Altogether it struck Estelle, who was something of a connoisseur in hair, as the most desirable head-covering she had ever set eyes upon. But more marvelous even than the hair was a hat which nestled lovingly upon her head. It was a gorgeous thing of black velvet and plumes, which made the golden hair seem more golden and the milky white skin more dazzling. Hair and hat were an irresistible combination. From morning till night this radiant creature was the center of an admiring masculine crowd. When she spoke, they held their breath, when she smiled, they roared in appreciative laughter and, if she expressed the slightest wish, they fought each other for the privilege of gratifying it.

Estelle followed the ship all day, tor-

turing herself with envy of this woman who pleased without effort.

Then suddenly toward nightfall a squall came up. The beautiful woman on the ship was too busy enchanting everybody in sight to notice it.

That was how it happened that she was standing out on the open deck when the wind swooped.

It was all over in a second. The first gust of the gale got under the beautiful black hat and hurled it far out across the waves. But horror of horrors, — the hat was securely fastened to the lady's hair, — more securely in fact than the hair was attached to the lady herself. In a second the lady's circle of admirers were convulsed with jeering laughter. Estelle recognized their laugh as the same she had heard so often as the sailors swam back to their ships after she had failed to charm them. It was the same laugh and for the

same reason. The beautiful lady was as bald as Estelle herself.

All this Estelle noticed in the twinkling of an eye, while the lady's head-covering was flying through the air, and before it finally dropped into her own outstretched arms. Her first thought was to swim after the ship and give back the hair to the lady but her generous impulse lasted only a second. Without the hair the lady looked like Estelle; with it Estelle might look as the lady had. Estelle turned and dived straight for the bottom of the ocean.

You will have to imagine how she looked when she came home that night, resplendent with elaborately dressed golden hair and the large, velvet hat with ostrich plumes. All the Tritons and mermen and even the masculine fish clustered about her — while other mermaids hung around in an outer circle,

murmuring "Peroxide" as a sort of a cuss-word.

Handsome Herbert, the scrumptious Triton, fell for her at once and on the second day after Estelle blossomed out as a deep-sea show girl he proposed to her. Under the golden tresses, however, Estelle had developed a slight swelling that blinded her to his charms and she did not flop into his arms as she had often pictured herself doing. On the contrary she refused to give him a definite answer and went up and sat on a rock to sing to the seamen.

This time she was successful. Every sailor who caught a glimpse of that golden head sprang overboard and swam to her side. Every evening it was the same. It got so that ships had to avoid her part of the ocean if they wanted to get into port. Estelle was so popular and so busy sirening that she frequently had to keep at it

until after eight bells of the dog watch which is dreadful late to have to stay awake.

But always when she came in, there was faithful Herbert with a reproachful look in his eyes, waiting to ask her if she had made up her mind yet. And always she yawned and told him to wait until to-morrow.

That sort of thing went on for fifty years. Estelle was still as beautiful as ever because mermaids never grow old, but the same cannot be said of the black velvet hat. Estelle did not know it but that kind of millinery went hopelessly out of style. It got so far behind times that even the sailors noticed it and laughed a little at her when she was sirening. Finally it got so they laughed almost as much as they used to when she was bald and a terrible fear clutched at the heart of Estelle. With tears in her eyes she

caught one of the seamen as he was swimming back to his ship and demanded an explanation of his laughter.

"It's the lid, little one," he explained, floating on his back for a moment to rest. "They ain't been wearing that kind of a bonnet since the year Fremont ran against Buchanan."

Deeply humbled, Estelle went home. Herbert was waiting for her but she thought she detected the suspicion of a smile on his handsome mouth and she whisked past him angrily, giving him a slap with her tail as she went by.

For days and days she sulked in her coral cave and would speak to no one. Her sisters, talking among themselves, commented on the fact that Herbert, the Triton, no longer stood outside the door, having deserted his post for the first time in fifty years, and they cast commiserating glances at Estelle, who seemed doomed

to be an old mermaid. Bitterly she upbraided herself for not marrying Herbert when she had the chance. Day succeeded day and Estelle grew pale and thin, pining for the love she might have had.

Then one sunny morning Neptune came to her and said that Herbert was back and wanted to see her. With a thrill Estelle said she would be down in a minute and began taking off the hat which had not left her head in fifty years. Her golden curls she arranged as becomingly as she knew how and putting on a fresh pleasant smile which she fixed as firmly as possible she was all ready to meet her fate.

Sure enough, Herbert was there, carrying a great, round, pasteboard box, tied with ribbons, which he held out to her silently. With trembling fingers she opened it and there was a tiny, exquisite

hat of the latest fashion, with wonderful aigrettes and a golden buckle on it.

With a cry of delight Estelle turned to Herbert. He, wisest of all the Tritons, stood with open arms.

CHAPTER XII

LATER BULLETIN: THE MAN HAS TO LEAVE

"THEN what do you think he said?" questioned Philip of the little peasant girl.

She answered, sleepily, "Uncle Sam, I love you," then yawned and shut her eyes, as she leaned against his shoulder.

"That wasn't exactly what she said but it was nearly that."

"Uncle Sam, I —" She reached out and slipped one of her tiny hands in his. Then with a contented sigh she broke off in the midst of her single English phrase and fell asleep.

"Now it's time to dress and go to the place where you are going to sleep," suggested the man, loudly.

The girl turned her head on his shoulder, reaching for a softer hollow, apparently found it and rested more heavily against him.

"I said," repeated the man, "that it's time to —"

He looked around helplessly. What was the correct thing to do when a tiny little lady in pajamas fell asleep on one's shoulder?

His indecision lasted but a moment. He rose, picked up the warm, slender body in his arms, letting the voluminous bath robe fall to the floor, and transported her, with the long pajamas legs and arms dangling over her feet and hands, to the adjoining room and placed her on his bed. Almost instantly she assumed the customary attitude of an anchovy when he sees a piece of toast. Yes, she was sound asleep. It would be a shame to awaken her, but, good Lord!—did she always smile when she slept

and was it natural for a girl's cheeks to be so pink and her lips so red? Maybe she was feverish. He put his hand on her cheek to find out but drew it away quickly when she nestled her face in it as if she expected it to stay there as a pillow. No, her cheek was not hot.

He covered her up warmly, opened the windows wide, got his hat and coat, turned out the light and tip-toed quietly to the door.

Downstairs, in the hallway of the apartment building he waited until his artist friend returned.

"Where's the kid?" Jack demanded. "I've found a place for her. It ain't much but it will do for to-night. It's on —"

"Never mind telling me where it is. Take me there. I'm going to sleep in it myself."

Before morning he regretted his generos-

ity at least once an hour. Rather a fastidious sleeper anyway, the squeaky springs and hard, lifeless mattress of his hastily requisitioned quarters compared ill with the bachelor comfort of his apartment and kept him from more than dozing all night long.

Well, it was only one night. When he got up in the morning his chief idea was to get rid of her as quickly as possible. Fortunately it was a fine, sunshiny day. It would not be so hard to turn her adrift in pleasant weather. It should be done right after breakfast.

He decided not to make the move before breakfast because it would not be fair to expect a lady to face the world unfed. Breakfast, then, was his first concern and as he walked over to his own apartment he tried to think of some restaurant he might take her to where her conspicuously foreign costume would not cause

comment. A diligent search of his memory failed to turn up a recollection of any such a place. Possibly the hall-boy would know.

He did. Philip sent him up to his apartment to tell Molly in German to be ready for breakfast in twenty minutes and that he, Mr. Philip Smith, would come for her after that interval.

Philip spent the time in reading the morning paper and then with mixed feelings took the elevator up to his own floor. What would she look like by daylight? Of course his literary imagination had been playing him tricks and a before-breakfast scrutiny would reveal her as of a coarse, common type, with none of the Dresden china shepherdess qualities with which his fancy had been investing her. Almost with regret he turned the key in his own door. It was too bad to spoil the recollection he had of her with an uninteresting reality.

He opened the door. The air was pleasantly chill as if it had just been let in from outside. There was no one in the room, but a delicious aroma flavored the atmosphere with the unmistakable fragrance of coffee. The table was covered with a hitherto unused cloth that went with the apartment and the silverware was more or less correctly distributed for the service of one person. In amazement he noted that on the table were sugar and cream. His recollection of the stores in his commissariat included only a lot of cigars and some whiskey.

"Molly," he called sharply.

"Ja, Uncle Sam," came pleasantly from the kitchenette, followed shortly by Molly herself, clattering noisily across the floor in her preposterous wooden-soled shoes.

Clad once more in her own costume and smiling with ingratiating cheerfulness, she aroused in him the pleasant sensation of

a dream come true. She wasn't so bad after all, even in daylight. Her hair was pretty and she looked clean.

"Guten Morgen." She dropped him a sort of a curtesy.

"Good morning, good morning," answered Philip absently, still absorbed in contemplation of her. "Now, where did you get the coffee and cream and sugar?"

She looked at him inquiringly and shook her head.

"Here." He picked up the cream pitcher, held it out, shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ach —" She took his hand and led him to the kitchenette. "Komm hier."

She opened the door of the dumb waiter, made the motion of pulling something up and then of reaching out and taking things from the tiny service elevator. Then she laughed.

"By George! You pinched our neighbors' supplies off from the dumb waiter, did you? I suppose you thought that in this country things were free."

She closed the dumb waiter and made vigorous signs that he should sit down and have breakfast.

He took his seat with mingled sensations of amusement and satisfaction. It was the first time he had taken a meal in a place he could call his own home since he had lived with his parents.

First Molly brought in a grape fruit properly prepared. She had evidently seen service in some high-class family abroad. Probably the tenants of the apartments above would have him arrested before lunch but he might as well eat what there was now.

He discovered on finishing his fruit that Molly had unearthed a small tap bell from somewhere and when he touched

it she appeared instantly and removed the dishes.

The remainder of his breakfast, consisting of broiled lamb chops, fried potatoes, hot muffins and coffee, was a credit to Molly's skill and his neighbor's shopping ability. Never had Philip enjoyed a meal more or been so attentively and unobtrusively served.

After breakfast he noticed with pleasure that his desk had been dusted, the waste basket emptied and his books straightened up. There was something, after all, in having a woman about the place, especially an efficient and willing one. Just as a personal luxury he had half a mind to keep her. It would be comfortable to have everything done for him and to have his meals right at home.

But pshaw, it was out of the question. He couldn't afford it and she would un-

doubtedly be in the way while he was working.

From the kitchenette came her voice as she washed the dishes. She sang very softly, evidently merely an accompaniment to happy thoughts, but Philip discovered suddenly that he had never heard any pleasanter music in the world than just a woman singing about her work. He made a memorandum of the fact in a note-book, to use later in one of his stories.

Having her turn out to be so pleasant and cheerful really made it harder to send her away but it must be done. When the dishes were washed Molly came into the living-room. Now was the time. He must do it quickly and get it over so he could go back to work.

What was she doing? Oh! She placed the cloth head-dress on her hair and then the shawl across her shoulders. She was

going without being sent. Probably she had realized that he could not keep a maid and was leaving of her own accord to get a better job. That made it easy. He drew a sigh of relief not unmixed with regret when he thought of that heavenly breakfast.

She came to his desk and held out her hand.

Rather unusual sort of a farewell from a servant, thought Philip, but possibly customary in Germany. He shook hands with her.

"Now, Molly," he lectured wisely, "be very careful in the future about getting wet and not changing your clothes. You seem to be very thoughtless about such matters. I don't think of any other advice I can give you that you would understand or remember. Good-bye." He paused. "Good-bye!" he repeated with emphasis.

"Good-bye," she enunciated uncertainly after him.

He turned back to his work.

"Uncle Sam."

He looked up once more. She stood with her hand out as before.

"Geld."

"Money? Why, you mercenary little wretch. I suppose you think you are entitled to pay for getting my breakfast."

"Ohne Geld kann ich nicht die Speise einkaufen."

"We won't argue about it. If you think there is anything coming to you I am willing to settle." He drew out his slender roll of bills and gave her one of the two-dollar denomination. "All right?" he inquired.

"All right," she repeated gravely and trotted out of the room. Scorning the elevator she walked downstairs, as he could tell from the "clump, clump" of the

wooden shoes, that floated back to him long after she had gone.

Philip laughed as he resumed the literary attitude of being about to work when an idea comes. Two-thirds of authorship consists of lining up in front of a desk persistently. If you stay there long enough you will be forced to write something.

That morning he accomplished a good deal before Jack Herrick arrived, walking in without knocking, as was his custom. Philip always left the catch off the door during the day.

"Well," said Jack, depositing his bulk gingerly on one of the straight-backed chairs, "did you get rid of the Dutch K. M. all right?"

"Yes, she went of her own accord. You ought to see the breakfast she got for me, though, before she left. If the French chef, down in that place where you

think you eat, could have tasted it he would have expired with envy. It would spare the world considerable indigestion if he did."

"What I came to tell you this morning is that before she left Marian asked us both to come to Boston Friday night for Saturday and Sunday. I guess she hates to have you out of her sight any longer than that. I told her I thought we would come but I forgot to mention it to you last night."

"Why, let's see —" began Philip, wondering why he did not leap at the invitation.

"It's nothing to me, you know," Jack filled in the pause. "I'm not press agent for this show. We'd probably have a rotten time, anyway. I always do when I visit anybody. But I told her I'd speak to you and there you are."

"I'll write to Marian about it," decided

Philip with a twinge of conscience, as he thought of the letter he had started to compose to her the night before.

"At any rate, I'll take you to lunch now," Jack invited, "if you'll promise not to speak once of the breakfast you had this morning and compare all other food in the world unfavorably with it."

"That's a fair bargain."

Philip was in the act of closing his desk for the morning when the two men were surprised to see the door open gently and a small figure entirely surrounded by bundles enter the room and pass a trifle noisily to the kitchenette.

Jack stood open-mouthed.

"I thought you fired her."

"I thought I had," Philip assured him.

Molly returned after having deposited her bundles in the kitchenette and gravely offered Philip a dollar bill and twenty-four cents in change which he accepted in

dazed wonder. As if it were a matter of course she spread the cloth on the table once more and drew up two chairs.

"I regret," stated Philip politely, watching this manœuvre, "that I must decline your invitation to lunch, Jack, but as a sort of earnest of my good will I invite you to share my humble fare instead. I don't know what it is going to be but it is more than you deserve."

"You aren't going to keep her?"

"I don't seem to have any choice in the matter. At any rate I'm not going to fire her again before lunch."

"By George, that does smell like actual coffee," Jack ejaculated, sniffing the air. "I guess I'll stay and eat with you."

In the intervals between the cheerful rattle of pots and pans in the kitchen Molly appeared to set the table. She was wearing one of her purchases, a diminutive white apron trimmed with a quality of

lace that never came out of the five and ten cent stores. Another purchase made its appearance on the table in a tiny glass vase, two cream-colored roses, slightly pink at the curly edges of the petals. They made the place a home instead of simply a place to live.

The eye of the artist lighted up with pleasure. "I'll tell you, Phil," he proposed, "if you can't afford to keep this girl, I'll hire her. Any servant who would think of getting roses for the table can darn my socks whether they need it or not."

"You know, don't you," began Philip, resentfully, "that maid-servants aren't supposed to darn socks?"

"No, I don't, but I'm willing to pay for whatever she can do. Tell her so for me, will you?"

"Not until after lunch. I don't want to spoil the girl's appetite."

"You want to get rid of her don't you?"

"Ye-es," assented Philip doubtfully, wishing that she had not come back at all to torment his mind and digestion.

"Well, then, send her to me. I'll see that she has good care."

"Oh, you will? I suppose you'll give her a saucer of milk and a nice basket to sleep in near the stove?"

Further discussion was cut short by the appearance of Molly who announced, "Das zweite Frühstück ist fertig."

Jack frankly expressed his joy in the abilities of Molly as a cook. He was beginning to see himself sitting down to an endless succession of perfect meals, served by a quaint, little, pink and white doll with wooden-soled shoes. Philip, who was attempting to contemplate her in the past tense, was correspondingly depressed.

"Cheer up, Phil." Jack allowed himself to be helped a second time to omelette à petit pois. "You can drop in at my place any time. There will always be a place set for you."

"Thanks and go to hell," murmured Philip pleasantly.

"You know you can't afford to pay for meals like this. Come own up now,—how much did she spend for supplies?"

"Seventy-six cents."

"Including the roses? Don't make me laugh. You couldn't do it in Medicine Hat, North Dakota, let alone New York."

"You saw the change she gave me. I gave her two dollars." In his heart Philip had not the confidence that his words conveyed. He was remembering with dismay Molly's medieval methods of securing rations that morning. He was wondering if she would have time to get away before the police came. Perhaps

she would be safe in Jack's apartment. Later he could explain to his friend her primitive notions of foraging.

"I think I'll take her over with me now." Jack decided, after luncheon was over. "Then she can sort of get used to things before dinner."

"All right." Philip sighed. "Molly—"

She came to him trustfully.

"Ja, Uncle Sam."

His heart smote him but he went on.

"Molly, you are to work for this gentleman. I cannot pay you but he can. Listen — gehe mit." He pointed to Jack. "Arbeiten." He made motions as if washing dishes. "Geld." He placed her hand in Jack's.

She shook hands gravely and said colorlessly, "Good-bye."

"What?" exclaimed Jack.

"I taught her that this morning," Philip hastened to explain, "when I sent

her away. She doesn't know what she is saying."

"Oh!"

Jack, still holding her by the hand, started across the room. She followed docilely enough until he opened the door, then suddenly she pulled back and burst into a torrent of German.

"What's it all about?" Jack was startled by the outburst.

"She wants her shawl and cap." Philip interpreted, getting those articles for her.

"Nein, nein," she wailed. "Nur hier soll ich arbeiten."

"Now she's ready," said Philip.

"All right, good-bye."

Jack started to lead her across the threshold, then all at once dropped her hand with a yell of pain.

Molly scurried like a frightened hen across the living-room to the dark recess of the kitchenette. Philip followed her

there. She fled to a corner. He stood over her. She dropped on her knees and took his hand, looking up into his eyes with tearfully desperate earnestness. "Choo, — choo, — choo, — Uncle Sam I love you, — nicht good-bye," she repeated pleadingly.

Philip went out to where Jack was nursing his right shin carefully.

"Come on," Philip invited, leading the way out. "I'm going to see if I can get a room in the servants' quarters in this building. Molly has decided to stay."

"That's what I thought," growled his friend. Then as they stood waiting for the elevator Jack produced a five-dollar bill which he handed to Philip.

"What's this for?"

"For shoes for Molly," said Jack, then added ruefully, "without wooden soles."

CHAPTER XIII

THE APARTMENT IS DISCOVERED TO BE LARGE ENOUGH FOR TWO

THAT was how Molly became a part of the machinery of Philip Smith's household. He told her that he would soon find a good position for her and return to his original scheme of life. This was at first. After she had been there a few days he shamelessly admitted that she was a fixture and he made a permanent arrangement for sleeping quarters for her in the same building.

He found that he felt toward her as no human being has a right to regard another unless he is the Czar of Russia. His was a benevolent despotism which partook a little of the kindly authority of parent-

hood. She was so guileless and ignorant of American things that he felt that he stood between her and destruction. Then, too, he was educating her. Every day he taught her a few words which she picked up with surprising rapidity and it was not long before she was able to understand simple sentences, although she was not very sure of English constructions and idiom when it came to speaking herself.

She had a marvelous shopping instinct. Money in her hands bought such surprising quantities and qualities that Philip was inclined to be suspicious but as the days went by and she did not get arrested he ceased to think about it.

He had given her the five-dollar bill which Jack had contributed toward her wardrobe and instructed her to get substitutes for the heavy shoes. She managed in addition, to secure a trim, black dress which did not detract in the least from her

appearance, so that as far as externals were concerned she passed easily as a regular maid of all work. Philip almost regretted the quickness with which she had become Americanized.

In Molly's education Jack had also been a considerable, although not necessarily a helpful, factor. He had promptly forgiven her for kicking him on the shins and she had apologized in German with downcast eyes the very next day. Jack had proved his good will by staying to dinner and afterwards insisting on helping with the dishes while he taught her a collection of perfectly useless words such as "parabola," "isosceles" and "osteopath." He gave her the impression that they were highly potent swear words.

All day Friday of that week Philip suffered from an acute sense of something he had to do. About noon he discovered what it was.

Jack called up.

"Are we going to Boston?" he inquired over the telephone.

"Great Scott!" Philip ejaculated. "That's what I've been trying to think of."

"Well, don't break the machinery with undue haste but shall I get tickets?"

"Why — let's see," Philip deliberated, "I don't believe I can go."

"Why not?"

"Working on a story."

"Rats. You finished that yarn last night. You've struck a place in your novel where you can't go any further for a while. You told me so yourself. What you need is to get away."

"No, honestly I can't do it." Then he added, speaking his thoughts absently, "I'm afraid Molly wouldn't know what to do without me."

"Conceited ass," came sweetly over the instrument. "If that is what's worrying

you I'll sacrifice myself. I'll stay home and eat Molly's cooking. Marian doesn't care whether I come or not, anyway."

"No, I couldn't go now. I'll tell you: you wire Marian we are detained on business and that we'll both come next Thursday and stay as long as she likes."

"Why do I send this wire? Why do I stand here in this stuffy, drug-store booth, while you sit quietly in your own flat, listening to the preparations for lunch? Why do you have all the luck? Why is it that —"

Philip hung up the receiver and laughed silently at his mental picture of Jack asking himself questions until Central requested him to drop another nickel.

That afternoon Philip sent off his latest story to the friendly editor who had bought some of his other work. This new one he felt was much better, more real,

somehow, than his former efforts and he was eager to receive the praise of the magazine man.

On his way home Philip bought a first reader and a German dictionary. The English language might as well be attacked along conventional lines.

Molly was delighted with the reader and for some reason laughed herself almost into hysterics when she first looked at the pictures. Philip failed to see where the comedy came in but he flattered himself that his sense of humor was too highly cultivated to be amused at the same things that convulsed a German peasant girl.

They had some difficulty over the first lesson because Molly thought the picture of the cat inaccurate and insisted on drawing it over again with a curly tail. When she had the illustration corrected to her satisfaction, however, she proved a docile

pupil and by nightfall could read, "See the cat," clear across the room.

The reading lesson became part of Philip's general daily programme. The rest of his time was devoted to serious literary labors on his novel which strangely enough commenced to write itself, even at inconvenient hours of the night, when Philip personally would have preferred to sleep. Molly interfered not at all. Except at meal times or when he gave her a reading lesson, she kept to her own room in the servants' quarters or went shopping for bargains.

Suddenly it became "next week Thursday" long before Philip expected it and he had to go to Boston, reluctantly relinquishing the novel and Molly's education. He rebelled strenuously at the idea of leaving Molly alone in the city but as Jack pointed out she really was old enough to take care of herself.

Before he left, however, he gave Molly explicit directions in words he had taught her himself what to do while he was away. He invented strange and unnecessary tasks of cleaning and polishing to take up her time and keep her from the temptations of the street. Further he commanded her to write a letter to him every day to let him know how she was getting along. This he calculated, judging from her habit of handling a pen as if it were a clothes-pole would use up a lot of time and would also serve to a certain extent in lieu of her English lesson.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ADDITION TO THE FAMILY

MOLLY'S first letter came to him in Boston on Saturday. It was written on his own stationery and consisted of equal parts of scrawly words, spluttery blots and blistered areas which Philip with a twinge of conscience put down to tear-stains called forth by the unaccustomed literary task. It read:

Mein lieber Unkel Sam: —

I wurk today. The kat will catch the rat. I ete tafy. The boy down stares gif me him. I like him. He is like suger.

Your resp,
Moly.

Criticized according to the standards of English maintained at Harvard it didn't

amount to much but as the composition of a scholar of only two weeks' standing it ranked very high. Philip showed the letter to Jack with a pride that made no pretense at being restrained.

"Humph," sniffed Jack, holding it gingerly by one corner, "it looks as if she used her finger for a pen, doesn't it? Where did she get that 'Your r-e-s-p?' That doesn't sound like Molly, especially the abbreviation." He turned the sheet of paper over. "Oh!" he murmured.

"Oh, what?" Philip demanded.

Jack handed back the note, face down.

On the back Philip read:

P.S. The hal boy rote this for me. His name is Louie.

"The little devil!" Philip ejaculated. "And I was feeling sorry for her ink-stained fingers."

Neither of the men had mentioned Molly to Marian. Philip had discovered on attempting to marshal the account of her adventures into words that it was a hard story to tell to a woman and Jack followed his lead without comment.

Marian had been unaffectedly glad to see them both and every effort was made by the members of the large and clannish family to give them a good time. Judged from the standpoint of an outsider, Marian was more popular with her relatives than she admitted. She seemed in fact a brilliant, adored idol, frankly admired by the rest of the family, who were too busy to cultivate external beauty in themselves.

Philip owned to feeling vaguely disappointed in Marian herself. Surrounded by big brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces she was somehow less interesting than when he had regarded her as a

single, rare, exotic flower with no apparent logical connection with the commonplace flora and fauna round about. Alone with her, he had felt that he understood her perfectly; now between him and her there stood the "family" wall, which in the home camp makes even the most intimate friends seem foreigners.

On Sunday, Philip had suggested going home but was overruled by a storm of protests and Marian's reminder that he had promised to stay as long as she wished him to.

Monday brought a second letter from Molly.

Mein lieber Unkel Sam: —

Louie lern me lots nu wurds. I like him. I mus cloz and go muving pitchers mit Louie.

Yours resp,
Moly.

Philip packed his grip before he announced at luncheon that he must catch

an afternoon train to New York. This time Marian made no appeal save a look of reproach.

"I have to keep working on my novel or I'll lose the thread of it," he lied, with a voice that trembled from lack of familiarity with untruth.

Jack laughed and then covered his confusion with a clumsy pretense of choking on an oyster.

On the train that afternoon Philip told Jack of his fears.

"She ought not to go places with that hall-boy. We don't know who he is."

"We don't know who Molly is, as far as that is concerned," Jack returned. "You can't expect her never to have any more pleasure in life, just because she works for you. Merely regarding your countenance every day doesn't take the place of all amusement, you know. As long as she can cook a steak the way she does, what

do you care how she spends her time outside of work hours?"

"I feel responsible for her."

Jack sniffed and refused to discuss it further.

When he came into the apartment building that evening Philip was pleasantly greeted by the hall-boy who failed to understand why Mr. Smith's response was so gruff.

Still wearing an air of displeasure with the world in general he let himself into his apartment. He was determined to be cross no matter what happened.

At the sound of the door closing with a slam Molly came out of the kitchenette, her face wreathed in smiles.

"Ach, mein Uncle Sam, Sie sind zurück heimgekommen. I bin glad."

She helped him off with his overcoat and put that and his hat away. He did not speak to her.

"I get etwas to eat, ja?"

"Yes. Is there anything in the house?"

"Ja. I thinked you come to-day."

"What? You thought I'd come home to-day? What made you think that?"

Molly smiled to herself and replied with a long German sentence which Philip did not understand.

He growled and turned automatically to his desk to examine the mail. There was a letter from his friend the editor returning his story. He regretted, the letter ran, that it was out of the line of stuff they were using in his magazine and advised him to stick to the more popular style of slapdash fiction until he could command a market with the purely literary magazines.

This was distinctly depressing and took the edge off from the rôle he was playing. It is poor comfort to be told your output is so good you can't sell it. The world was presenting to him a very cold shoulder.

Incidentally he had depended on the sale of that manuscript for living expenses. He would have to practice rigid economy until he could write a potboiler of some kind.

He was occupied earnestly with the problem of maintaining existence when Molly announced dinner, and he absent-mindedly consumed almost all of an excellent purée before he noticed anything different about the table.

"It seems to me," he commented, "that the silver looks brighter than it ever did before. You didn't buy new silverware, did you, Molly?"

"Nein," she replied. "I shine him ein wenig, that's all."

"Oh!" Philip picked up a spoon and examined the back of it. "Did you put the 'Sterling' mark on it too?"

"I weiss nicht what you say, 'Sterling mark.'"

"No, of course not. It's funny, though,

that an apartment building like this should furnish solid silver tableware."

Everything about the apartment wore a virtuous air of soap and water. The somewhat shabby window curtains had been replaced with soft, rather bright-colored ones of some cheap material. Philip inquired about them.

"Louie, he take me always to dinner," Molly explained. "I buy things mit what you give me for eating."

Philip found it impossible to be as cross as he wished at the thought of Molly going out with Louie to save money for household improvements. He compromised with his temper by saying nothing. Molly seemed disappointed.

After dinner she brought a rather bulky package and laid it on the table before him.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Surprise," she ejaculated.

"Undoubtedly."

"I learn me that word by Louie."

Philip untied the parcel and removed the wrappings. Contained therein was a magnificently ornamental clock so brilliantly gilded that it hurt the eyes to look at it. Philip was stunned. There was a card attached to it.

He read, "Klok frum Moly."

Molly clapped her hands.

"Did you buy this?" he demanded.

"Der Spetzereinhandler give me him for trading stamps," she explained gleefully, then contemplating their acquisition critically, she added, "It ticks loud."

"That is very essential to a good clock." Philip was forced to unbend before her delight in making him a present. "You shall wind it, Molly, and no one else shall ever touch it. This little clock's life will depend entirely upon you. If you let it run down, no one else will ever start it again."

The ceremony of winding the machinery and setting the hands over, Philip placed the golden horror on the mantelpiece. They contemplated it in an admiring silence broken only by the cheerfully noisy "tick-tock" of the new member of the family.

"She clucks like a hen," Molly commented.

"Thank you ever so much, Molly, for the clock. It is just what we needed and it certainly ticks beautifully. I don't think I have ever been so pleased with a present in my life."

"It costs not much," Molly apologized, diffidently.

"That is one of the charming things about poverty, Molly. People who have lots of money can't appreciate little things the way we can. I know because once I had money."

"I sorry, — you lose him."

"I'm not," Philip patted her arm gently, "because if I hadn't lost my money I wouldn't have found you."

"But you not find me, — I find you."

"Have it your own way. It isn't customary, however, for a woman to insist on the literal translation of a near-proposal. If you prefer to consider yourself Columbus I will take the minor role of the boiled egg or whatever it was he discovered."

Molly dwelt upon his speech mystified. "You — use — such — big — words — das ich nicht verstehen."

"That," returned Philip airily, "is why I employed the polysyllables. With the aid of a dictionary I could say almost anything to you without any danger of a suit for breach of promise, you adorable minx."

Molly went back to her work, humming softly to herself, and Philip reluctantly allowed a feeling of happiness and content-

ment to banish his grouch. After all she had been thinking of his comfort while he had been away and she couldn't have had time for much mischief with the amount of cleaning she had done. A man couldn't help being agreeable while he listened to that voice and that little haunting melody she seemed always to be singing. He had a remembrance of having heard the music before but couldn't fit words to it. No matter, it was probably a German folk song.

He sat rocking his mind in a cradle of pleasant thoughts long after Molly had gone for the night. For the first time in his life, without knowing just why, he found that he was contented, that despite the fact that he was not sure how to pay for next week's groceries there was really nothing he wanted that he did not have.

CHAPTER XV

TWO LADIES DISCOVER THE EXISTENCE OF EACH OTHER

IT was a month before Marian returned and in celebration Philip gave a dinner for her in the apartment. Jack was, of course, included in the party.

Both men met her at the railroad station.

Marian was slightly mystified when they spoke of eating at Philip's flat but supposed that they intended having dinner brought up from the café and made no comment.

When, however, they were seated at a faultlessly appointed table and Molly came in from the kitchenette with the soup, Marian opened her eyes wide with astonishment. Not a detail of Molly's features or clothing escaped her scrutiny.

"Explain," she requested smiling, when Molly had finished serving and gone away again. "Does she come from the restaurant downstairs or did you have a catering company send in a meal with her to serve it?"

"Molly?" Philip returned, with ponderous carelessness. "She's just my maid of all work."

"Maid? Do you mean she is here all the time and gets all your meals?"

"Why, yes. What do you think of her?"

"I think she is too pretty altogether," Marian laughed, with a confidence bred of a knowledge of her own good looks. "That is, she is too pretty for you. Let me have her. I'll trade you a nice, great, big, black one for your tiny, little, pink one."

"It won't work," Jack declared. "I tried to steal her away from him but all I got for my trouble was a kick in the shins."

Marian laughed aloud.

"I can't imagine Phil kicking you in the shins," she exclaimed.

Jack glanced carelessly at Philip, the latter winked imperceptibly and they both joined in Marian's laughter.

If the guest had made a careful inventory of the servant's appearance there was no lack of shrewdness in the appraising look with which the servant honored the guest when next she entered the dining-room. Her feminine eye dwelt lovingly on the perfect fit of Marian's gown and paid tribute to the simple but effective coiffure created from the wealth of Marian's hair.

Jack, who sat across the table from Marian, caught Molly's eye as she was standing behind the guest's chair, balancing a bowl of gravy in her hand. Molly blushed at being discovered in envious contemplation of the other woman. She looked inquiringly at Jack and made a motion as if to tip the contents of the

gravy bowl over Marian's head. Jack, with horror-stricken eyes, shook his head vehemently.

"What on earth is the matter, St. Vitus?" Marian saw his apparently meaningless motions.

"He's flirting with Molly," Philip explained. "He has spoiled her so already that I'll have to fire her about next week if she doesn't reform."

"It seems to me that you discuss her rather freely when she is present." Marian administered the reproof smilingly.

"She doesn't understand what we say," Jack assured her. "Her residence in this country has been of but six weeks' duration, so she knows only a few English words. When Phil really wants to make her understand anything he tells it to her in German."

Molly coughed suddenly and left the room in a fit of choking.

The conversation shifted to other topics. They were quite the light-hearted trio they had always been. Marian devoted most of her attention and all of her wiles to Philip, but Jack took that as a matter of course and interjected remarks into the dialogue only when it seemed a social duty.

After the dinner he lounged out in the kitchenette, ostensibly helping Molly with the dishes and teaching her English.

Molly did not respond to his gaiety as buoyantly as usual.

"What's the matter, youngster?" Jack demanded, polishing a glass.

"Matter?" she repeated.

"Yes. Why so dismal? No smile?"

"Oh, I not know."

"Don't you like Mrs. Sutherland?"

"She much pretty, ja." Molly made a gesture indicating the woman in the next room.

"Exactly."

"Why you not marry with her?"

"Me? There are lots of reasons. For one thing she hasn't asked me to."

"Did she ask Uncle Sam?"

"I don't know. How would you like that? Then maybe they'd have a nice big flat for you to work in and later you could be nursemaid and take care of their babies."

"No, — no." Molly stamped her foot.

Jack looked at her in surprise.

Molly suddenly picked up the glass Jack had been wiping, held it to the light and pointed out several specks of lint on its polished surface.

"All right, I'll do it over but you needn't bite off my ears just for that."

Philip called from the other room, "Molly."

She hastily substituted a service apron for the checkered one she was using to wash dishes in and entered the living-room.

Marian, stretched at indolent length in the Morris chair, was smoking a cigarette.

"Bring an ash tray for Mrs. Sutherland," Philip directed.

Molly did so. Then she found Philip's box of cigars, allowed him to select one, and offered the box to Marian.

Marian laughed. "No, thank you."

The two women looked at each other squarely. Finally Marian took a puff at her cigarette, inhaled the smoke and blew it out languidly. Molly blushed.

"You may go, Molly," Philip interjected, nervously. "That is all I wanted."

A light flashed in Molly's eyes, immediately extinguished by a look of soft submission as she turned to Philip.

"Uncle Sam," she started, and then stopped.

"Yes, Molly, what is it?"

"Is she," Molly nodded toward Marian, "is she 'adorable minx' too?"

In the hot silence that fell Molly scurried to the kitchenette, unanswered.

For a while the dishwasher worked in silence. Finally she broke her reverie.

"You take her home to-night, yes?"

"You bet," Jack replied. "Why?"

"I just ask to know." Molly sighed with relief.

Late that night, while Marian, Jack and Philip smoked and lounged and discussed art, literature and themselves, a tiny figure in a narrow bed in a box-like room down in the servants' quarters tossed and squirmed, buried its face in the pillow, turned the pillow over, doubled it up and finally threw it out on the floor. After an hour or so the owner of that restless body got up and turned on the light.

With feverish haste she dressed her hair in a fair imitation of the way Marian wore hers. Then she threw back her nightdress from her slender young shoulders and

draped it in an impromptu décolleté. This done she confronted herself tragically in the small mirror over her washstand and subjected her face and figure to a pitiless scrutiny.

At length a smile broke over her features, the reflection smiled back at her, then she laughed, turned out the light and went back to bed.

This time she slept.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COST OF LIVING

THE days rolled on, each of the good ones being marked with the completion of a chapter of the novel, the bad ones with restless pacing of the floor and irritable depression. Molly had the run of the household so completely organized and knew Philip's moods so well, that she managed to help a great deal by serving meals at unobtrusive intervals and keeping carefully in the background at other times. In fact she spoiled him so thoroughly that he often doubted whether he would ever be able to work under ordinary conditions again without her to serve as a buffer between him and the annoyance of physical existence.

He had given her what money he had but it wasn't much and one morning before settling down to his work he held a session of the finance committee.

"How much money have we got, Molly?"

Molly was clearing the breakfast dishes from the table but she abandoned her task.

"Wait until in the book I look him up."

She went to a drawer in the sideboard and brought out a large ledger which she opened on the table and pored over industriously.

"How much is seventeen dollars when you take it away nineteen dollars and seventy-five cents?" she asked at last.

"Is that the way our books balance?"

"Ja. Yes."

"Bring it here."

She carried the ledger to Philip's desk and pointed to the place with her finger.

"Here comes it in and here goes it out."

"Oh yes. What is this? Three dollars for c-h-o-o-s?"

"He is for me. Choos — choos — choos —" Molly pointed at her feet. "Herr Herrick give us the money. Shouldn't I have done that?"

"Of course you should. How much money have we got?"

"Wait." Molly went to one corner of the rug, lifted it and picked up some coins from beneath it. "How much is one quarter, one dime, one nickel and one cent? I keep one, each kind, for a set." She held the money out in the palm of her hand.

"I see, — so that when we haven't any more we can still know what money looks like. You have forty-one cents according to my figures and we owe two dollars and seventy-five cents besides your wages for some weeks past. I think maybe we had better economize until I can sell something. Suppose we cut out the eggs for breakfast."

"Then only is left coffee and toast."

"That's enough. I've been eating too much lately. I'll look like Jack Herrick if you don't look out. I guess," he concluded regretfully, "I will have to abandon the great American novel for a day or so and write something with a couple of murders and a burglary in it. Crime may not be profitable to criminals but it certainly does pay us authors and playwrights."

The next morning he was a living testimony to his industry. The breakfast table found him haggard and limp from an all-night session with heroic crooks and virtuous burglarines.

True to his instructions, Molly served him a breakfast consisting solely of toast and coffee.

"Bring me the morning mail, Molly," he directed. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting but I worked late last night and over-

slept this morning. Did anyone call while I was asleep?"

"Only that lady —"

"Mrs. Sutherland?"

"Ja."

"Sorry I missed her. Did she leave any message?"

"No. You like her very much?"

"Oh, yes. I think she is very interesting. Don't you like her?"

"I like her better, I think maybe, if you don't."

"Jealous?"

"What's jealous, Uncle Sam?"

"It's something you put on bread and butter when you're a kid. Hello, what's this?" Philip ceased talking as he opened an envelope from which a check fell out.

There was a brief note accompanying the check written on the stationery of a downtown firm of lawyers.

It read:

Dear Sir:—

Your wife wishes to make you an allowance and we enclose her check for one hundred dollars on account.

Yours respectfully,
Strong and McCloskey.

"Molly, come here," Philip explained. "Look at this because you will never see so much money again in all your life. It's a check for one hundred dollars. See, here's the signature, 'Mary Smith,' and she's worth more thousands of dollars than you have cents hidden away under the rug. Look at her writing, Molly. It isn't so very much better than yours but when she puts her name on a paper like that every man in the world would fight for it while if you wrote your name there I don't suppose anybody would give a hang for it except me."

Molly looked at his face and then at the check.

"Then we are rich?"

Philip laughed.

"Not noticeably so. This money doesn't belong to us. A very kind lady sent it to us to look at, but I'm pretty sure she knew we would send it back." He got up and went to his desk.

Molly started to clear off the table.

"Maybe she wants to see if we would," she said, thoughtfully. "Do not you love Mary Smith?" Molly halted over the name.

"Bless you no. She's my wife. It isn't stylish to love your own wife,—not in New York, anyway."

"You like Mrs. Sutherland better?"

"Of course. Now you stop prying into my private affairs and I'll help you with the dishes."

Philip placed the check in an envelope which he addressed to "Mrs. Philip Smith, care of Dr. Allen."

"I do dishes all right myself. What you pay me for, I ask?"

"But I don't pay you, so it's no more than fair that I should help. Get me an apron."

Molly obediently found a plaid kitchen apron and tied it around him under the arms. This left a good deal of Philip exposed at either end and gave him slightly the appearance of a premier danseuse, all but the pink tights. He did a couple of grotesque steps with a plate in his hand like a tambourine.

Molly laughed. "It's fun playing house, — yes, Uncle Sam?"

A rap on the door interrupted his dancing.

Molly admitted the hall-boy from downstairs.

"How do you do, Louie?" greeted Philip. "Come in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Nice day, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

Molly finished clearing off the table and put a figured scarf on it in place of the table cloth.

"Have a chair, Louie," said Philip, determined to be a pleasant host.

"No, thanks. I can't stay but a minute."

"Ah, I see. You came on business."

"Yes, sir. It's about the rent. The agent was around this morning before you was up. He asked me to get the money from you. He says you're a month behind and he has to have the coin." Louie was visibly embarrassed by his rôle of collector. "You see, sir, he don't know you very well."

"No, that's true," admitted Philip, "but that isn't entirely my fault. He is one of the most diffident men I ever met. I don't really blame him a bit for wanting

his money. Now, I don't happen to have the cash this morning, but, let me see," he went to his desk and picked up some manuscript, "here is a story I am writing. I figure that it is worth about seventy-five dollars. I will give it to you just as it is for the sixty I owe you and you can finish it up to suit yourself. Shall I read it to you?"

The boy shook his head and shifted nervously on his feet.

Molly went to Philip's desk, picked up the envelope addressed to Mrs. Philip Smith and handed it to him with an appealing look in her eyes.

Philip shook his head.

"No, Molly, we'll fail under our own banner if we have to, but we won't accept anything we can't give value received for. I'm afraid we haven't anything more to sell here."

He turned to Louie.

"I'll have to think up some scheme,"

he said. "Come up in a couple of hours and I'll either be ready to pay you or we'll move out. Molly, I'll toss you to see who washes the dishes. The other one will wipe 'em." He put his hand in his pocket, then withdrew it empty. "Lend me a coin, Louie."

The boy gave him a quarter. Philip tossed it in the air and covered it between his hand and the table as it came down.

"Call, Molly," he directed.

"Heads."

He uncovered the coin.

"You win. I'll wash." He gave the quarter back to the hall-boy, who automatically murmured, "Thank you," as if it were a tip.

Philip disappeared into the kitchenette, whence issued soon after the crash and clatter of masculine dish-washing. The bell-boy started to go.

"Louie." Molly halted him.

"Yes, ma'm."

"Wait."

She took a roll of bills from her waist. "Here, take those and don't say something to him about it." She jerked her head toward Philip in the kitchen. "Never mind where I get him. You take those and maybe Uncle Sam shall forget all about it."

"Gee," exclaimed the boy, looking at the roll of bills. "I'll bet that's your wages for a year. Say, would you mind if I told you that I think you're all right?" He fumbled his cap in boyish embarrassment and looked at the floor.

"Thank you, Louie, and would you mind if I tell you I think you are a very nice, young boy?" She patted his arm.

"I ain't so darn young," he muttered, kicking his heel. "I'm seventeen and I, — oh, darn, I can't say it."

He turned, covered with confusion, and scurried away hastily.

Molly danced up and down with pleasure at this evidence of her powers.

Philip stuck his head out of the door and caught her at it.

"Say, Molly," he reminded her, sarcastically, "this is no dancing-class. Aren't you going to help?"

"Oh, I very sorry, Uncle Sam, but Louie, he is so nice."

Philip shook his fist at the door through which the boy had vanished. "Well, damn that young scoundrel!"

Molly mimicked him. "Well, damn that young scoundrel!"

"No! No!" protested the man. "Don't say everything that I do. It isn't nice for little Dutch girls to say 'damn.'"

"All right," Molly agreed, with instantaneous docility, "I say 'hell' instead?"

Philip put his hand firmly over her

mouth, thus inadvertently obliterating most of the rest of her features except her ears, and held her, thus squirming, while he delivered a lecture on profanity.

They were thus playfully engaged when Jack Herrick entered, as usual, without knocking. At sight of him they separated, laughing but unabashed.

"Good morning, Jack," greeted Philip.

Jack replied gloomily, "Good morning."

"Good morning, Herr Herrick."

"Don't call me 'Herr Herrick.' It sounds as though you were stuttering. Call me 'Old Top' or 'Fat' or 'Mister.'"

"I shall call you 'Herr Mister,'" decided Molly, as she marched off to the kitchenette.

"Now, sit down, Jack, and tell me what's on your mind."

"I will, if you'll take off that thing you've got on, that makes you look like a Scotch Salome dancer."

"All right, although as far as that goes I've seen you wearing this very apron, yourself."

"Maybe, but you do it with an abandon that is disgraceful."

"Well, it's off." Philip deposited the offending garment on a chair. "What's the matter?"

Jack glanced significantly toward the kitchenette. "Molly."

Philip laughed. "You, too?" He sat on the edge of his desk.

"You're doing a foolish thing, Phil."

"What's that?"

"Marian and I both noticed it and I decided I'd better speak to you about it. You are thinking of falling in love with Molly."

Philip smiled. "You're mistaken, Jack." Then after a pause he added, "No, by George, now you mention it, I believe you are right, except that I'm not thinking of

falling in love with Molly. I don't have to think. I've done it. It's accomplished."

"But, Phil, she's a servant."

"I don't know that it makes any difference much, what position a woman occupies," Philip replied slowly, "if she is like Molly. You old fraud, you are head over heels in love with her yourself."

"I know it," Jack returned simply. "I suppose, maybe that's why I can't stand idly by and see you break her heart without making some protest."

"Break her heart?" Philip echoed. "Who is going to break her heart? Man, I'll marry her."

"You're talking nonsense, old man," Jack argued, patiently. "Marriage would only mean unhappiness to both of you. You don't even know where she came from."

"She came in a silver ship with cobweb sails when the wind was blowing straight from fairyland."

"Very pretty, but not particularly sensible. Think of introducing to your friends and family a wife who speaks English like Sam Bernard and eats with her knife."

"She does not," retorted Philip. "She uses a fork for almost everything now —" he smiled reminiscently "— except pie."

"You're not being fair to Molly. You can't ask her to marry you, anyway. You're already married."

"So I am," Philip admitted. "I will be careful until I get a divorce, but I warn you, there is only one way you can prevent a horrible mésalliance between Molly and me."

"How?"

"By marrying her yourself. You're an artist, and artists don't have to be very particular because they're bound to be unhappy, anyway."

CHAPTER XVII

HABITS OF THE HEN

MANY times that morning after Jack had gone Philip laughed silently to himself. How ridiculous to apply the standards of ordinary convention to his relations with the little German girl. He had hardly stopped to try to define what those relations were before. Even now he didn't know whether he thought of her as a child or as a woman. Only that morning, in getting out clean clothing from his dresser, he had discovered that all his socks, neatly darned, had been ornamented with a tiny, green spider embroidered on the toe. A grown woman would never have done a thing like that. Nor would she have traded an old pair of trousers to

a junk dealer for a set of six iron stove lids because it "seemed like a lot."

She was singing in the kitchenette the same little melody he had heard her hum so often.

Philip tapped the bell on his desk. The singing stopped and Molly came to a position in back of him a little to one side. It was her usual response to a summons, like a soldier's automatic reaction to the command of "Attention."

"Did you want me, Uncle Sam?"

Philip did not turn his head, but kept on pretending to write. That was also part of the usual routine.

Finally without looking up he said, "Yes, Molly. If you will get your reader I will give you your lesson."

"Yes, sir."

From a drawer in the sideboard Molly brought a worn, cloth-covered book which

she deposited gravely on the desk at Philip's left hand.

After an interval, devoted also to an imitation of writing on Philip's part and respectful attention on Molly's, he further commanded, "Get a chair and sit here beside me."

He laid down his pen with apparent reluctance and picked up the book while she dragged a chair over near his.

"Let's see." He opened the book. "Where were we? Oh, yes, — lesson six. I can tell that because the pages we have been over look as if a fox terrier had been using them for a doormat. Read here."

He handed her the open book.

Molly bent over the page with painful earnestness. After a protracted study of the words, during which she mouthed them over silently to herself, she read slowly and haltingly. "See — the — hen. She — is — awful — sea — sick — because

— she — ate — a — very — squirmy — worm."

Philip halted her sternly. "Is that in the book?"

"Not all of it," Molly returned, glibly, "but it fits the picture and I don't know some of the words."

"Try again," Philip ordered.

"See — the — hen," Molly read and then stopped, twisting her feet up in the rungs of her chair in an agony of uncertainty over the next word.

"It isn't necessary to dislocate your ankles to master the English language," Philip observed, critically. "Try it with both feet on the floor."

Molly set her shoes squarely on the rug and started again.

"See — the — hen." She paused and went back once more as if a running start might carry her over the bad spot. "See the — hen —"

"You have that much perfectly," Philip commended. "I can visualize the hen without further reiteration."

"What is 'L-a-g-s'?" Molly looked up inquiringly, her finger planted firmly on the place to obviate the danger of the words scurrying away while she wasn't looking.

"What?"

"'L-a-g-s'?" She spelled it over again laboriously.

"Let me see that!" Philip was incredulous. "That isn't a 'g'; it's a 'y.'"

"It looks like a 'g' to me," Molly insisted politely, as one who was willing to give in but preferred to retain her own convictions. "'L-a-y-s.' What is that?"

"Lays."

"Oh!" Molly returned to the book. "See the hen. The hen lays — nice —"

"Well?"

Molly resorted to spelling once more. "'E-y-y-s.'"

"No," Philip corrected her patiently, "those are 'g's' this time."

"Oh. I wish they wouldn't jump around so much. 'E-g-g-s.'" She thought a moment and then spelled it over. "'E-g-g-s.'"

"You know that word. What do we have for breakfast?"

"Oh, I know." Molly brightened. "The hen lays nice coffee."

"No! no!"

"Toast?"

"No; eggs — eggs!"

"But," she objected, "we don't have eggs any more. We are too poor."

As she leaned over her book a small chamois bag, suspended around her neck by a ribbon, slipped out from the front of her waist. Before she could return it Philip noticed it.

"What is that?" he asked.

"What?"

"In the bag."

Molly tucked it away hastily.

"He is something — I not can tell you about him now. He bring luck if you not know. Some day when you send me away for always, when never I come back again, ever, then I give him to you, — you open him."

"If that's the only way I can find out, I hope that I shall never know."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE APARTMENT IS CROWDED

ONE fine afternoon Philip discovered that his novel was done, corrected and rewritten.

Further than that, he rather liked it. Not that he had any illusions that it made "The Broad Highway" look like the work of a hack writer, but he felt that he had done a readable yarn of a type that the public can be coaxed to buy.

He called Molly in to look at the bulky pile of manuscript.

"If I sell it, Molly, I'll buy you a new hat and we'll take dinner at the Plaza."

Her eye lighted up with joy for an instant, then the flash died away as she said,

"You are so good, Uncle Sam, but that I cannot did."

"Can't? Why?"

"One takes not one's servant to dine. I might get — what you call — fresh."

"We'll see about that."

Philip was putting his manuscript together when Jack came in with his artist's paraphernalia and asked if Molly could be spared to pose for him.

"I need her for an illustration I'm doing."

"Surely," Philip acquiesced, "if she is willing."

"May I draw your picture, Molly?" Jack requested of the young lady herself, who, with her sleeves rolled up and work-apron over her dress, looked the incarnation of industry.

"Yes, Herr Mister. Shall I dress me up?"

"No, I want you just as you are. Sit over here in this chair and I'll have a sketch

in a minute, — that is, if Philip doesn't mind my working here."

"Not a bit of it," his friend rejoined, "if you'll be fairly quiet. I have to write a letter to go with this book, so whatever you do, don't make Molly laugh, because when she laughs I can't think of a single other thing in all the world."

Philip inserted a piece of paper in his typewriter and began to write. Jack arranged his drawing-pad and silently and surely began to block in a sketch of Molly.

After five minutes of posing Molly began making frantic faces.

"Turn your head a wee bit this way, Mollykin," Jack requested, "and stop waggling your nose or I can't make any picture."

"If I don't waggle it, it will itch me to death."

"Scratch it then, but cease your imi-

tation of the Katzenjammer Kids while I get this outline done."

Molly was silent for possibly fifteen seconds and then she observed, "I don't believe Uncle Sam is working at all. I think he is watching us."

Philip suddenly discovered that his hands were lying idle in his lap and he hastily and noisily attacked his typewriter. The net result of his industry on paper was a statement to the effect that, "Now is the time for all good men and true to come to the aid of their party." This was repeated several times.

Jack shook his pencil at the girl.

"Molly," he said, "do you know, I am beginning to think you are a fraud."

Molly thought a moment and asked, "Is a fraud something that lives in a puddle like a toad?"

"No, and you know it isn't. You

know a lot more than anyone thinks you do."

"Oh yes. I learn me lots." Molly evidently regarded her education complacently. "Uncle Sam, he learn me."

"You know lots more than Uncle Sam ever taught you."

"No, — he learn me all, — reading, — spelling, — and talking, — and even thinking. I think I like talking best."

"So I gathered."

"But I like to spell, too. I spell me some words better as Uncle Sam. I can spell 'cat' with a 'k' and Uncle Sam never thought of that, he says. Can I look at the picture yet?"

"Not yet; maybe in a minute."

After a short pause Molly's mind asserted more thirst for information. "Are you a great artist, Herr Mister?"

"No, not now," Jack confessed. "I was a great artist when I was twenty-five.

I make better pictures now than I did then, but then I always knew that I was going to do something big some day; now I know that I probably never will."

"I don't think," Molly halted, "that I understand what you mean."

"I didn't think that you would."

Before the sitting was over Marian came in, wearing a great, heavy, fur coat and carrying a huge muff.

"May I bother you for a moment?" she asked at the door, not coming in until she was sure she was invited.

"Of course," Philip welcomed her, "if you'll explain the disguise. It's rather late for bears at this time of year. Most of your pals have hunted up hollow trees for the winter."

"My brother sent his touring car out for me to play with and I've come to take you and Jack riding. Will you come?"

"If you'll wait a minute or so until I

can get this manuscript wrapped up, we'll take it along and leave it on the door-step of a publisher I've heard of who is very kind to orphan novels. In the meantime let's take off the Siberian Mother Hubbard so you won't take cold."

As he put his arms across her shoulders from the back to lift the fur coat she turned her face and the back of his hand touched her cheek which was pleasantly cold. Shamelessly she turned her head a little further until her lips brushed his hand.

Then she laughed impudently in his face.

Philip surveyed her slender figure with approval.

"Inside the husk you aren't big enough to scare me at all. You peel down like a Chinese nested egg."

"Sir!" she exclaimed, with a mock expression of horror, then smiled. "According to the latest dictates of modern fashion, however, the next peeling doesn't

amount to much. If this dress was any tighter I couldn't get it on a nail in the closet."

Philip drew up a chair beside his desk.

"Sit down," he requested. "Don't mind if Jack doesn't pay any attention to you. He is doing a sketch of Molly, as you may have noticed."

"I'm very much displeased with Jack," Marian said, as she sat down. "He has neglected me shamefully of late. Whenever I want him he is over here."

"Jack and I are old friends. You must forgive me if I use up a lot of his time."

"You flatter yourself if you think you are the attraction."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at him."

Jack was exhibiting his sketch to Molly who had left the seat where she had been

posing and was now perched on the arm of Jack's chair, swinging her foot idly and smiling down into his face.

Philip sighed. "I wonder if you are right."

"Poor Jack!"

"Why, 'poor Jack'?"

"Suppose he should take it into his head to marry her."

"Why not?" Philip's loyalty to both Molly and Jack was aroused.

"A struggling artist with a wife to drag him down? You artists and authors must marry women of culture who can help you."

Molly was delighted with her own portrait.

"It is much — what you call him, — much gooder than what you ever did."

"Well," admitted the artist, "I never had such a good model before."

"You think I am a good model?"

"Yes."

"Maybe then if you draw me, you a great artist should be."

"If I could always draw you, I'm sure of it." The reawakening fires of ambition wiped out ten of Jack's forty-odd years. "It is because I haven't had you that I'm not a great artist. Every other woman I ever knew turned out to be worse than the pictures I made of her, but I could draw you all the rest of my life and never get all the wonder of you on paper."

A frightened look came into Molly's eyes.

"Jack," she exclaimed, as if she would stop him.

"I might as well tell it now, Molly," he continued, calmly. "I love you and want you to marry me." He paused a moment and looked into her eyes. "But you needn't tell me the answer. We will now pass to a discussion of why there is so much salt in grandma's buckweat pan-

cakes. Excuse me while I whistle the Wedding March by Chopin."

Molly's eyes were nearly filled up with tears.

"Jack," she said, "I mean, Herr Mister —"

"Call me Jack. It makes it easier."

"All right," Molly acquiesced. "I think you are one of the —" She searched her brain for the right adjective.

"Fattest men you ever knew," supplied Jack.

"No," she protested. "Don't make joke. I hurt me in here." She touched her throat. "I do love you so much but not—"

"The way you do someone else?"

She nodded.

"I was afraid so. I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"Who you sorry for?"

"God help us, Molly, I'm sorry for all of us. I hoped I could save you a heartache — and Phil."

When Philip was quite ready to go he helped Marian on with her coat once more.

"I'll be back in an hour or so," he told Molly.

"You'll want something warm to wear," Marian advised, as Philip got his hat. "Where's your winter overcoat?"

Philip paused and smiled.

"If you insist on knowing, it is here in this package." He tapped the novel. "For its size that bundle contains a surprising number of things. For instance you'd never think to look at it that there was a sack of flour in it and a pair of shoes, and a bunch of violets with an orchid in the middle for a lady who is kind to us and maybe a Christmas tree, — who knows? Pandora's box, itself, contained little more than this commonplace, brown paper parcel."

"But you'll freeze on the open car," protested Marian.

"No, I won't," said Philip. "Authors who have just finished novels don't freeze, — not unless they get them back. Come on, before the winter sun goes down."

At the curb Jack begged to be excused from going with them.

"I have to finish this picture." He indicated the sketch of Molly.

When they were started with the keen air rushing by, taking each word from their mouth and hurling it back over their shoulders, Philip said, "That was all nonsense about finishing the picture. He can't see to work much more to-day. What's the matter, I wonder?"

"My friend, he is in love, I tell you. He would rather be alone with his picture of her than to have his thoughts distracted by us."

"I can't believe it is so very serious."

"You don't have to. Love is a subject you don't know as much about as I do."

"Don't be too sure," he retorted. "I've been writing love stories all my life."

"Any woman in the world knows more about love than the greatest male author that ever lived."

"If you mean me," Philip murmured, in mock modesty, "I think you are putting it a trifle too strong."

A little later, Philip, whose mind was still dwelling on the strange behavior of Jack, said apropos of nothing in particular, "I don't think it is quite fair for Jack to fall in love with my housekeeper. Why, he might even take her away from me and then where would I be?"

"I don't suppose he thinks of that. You know the rules of love and warfare are strikingly similar."

Philip sighed. "I suppose you are right."

"Of course. What would you do if you loved a woman who needed you and be-

tween you and her stood the physical comfort of some friend?"

"I'd waltz on the ribs of aforesaid friend, of course, —" Philip laughed.

"There you are. The non-combatant on the field of battle is more apt to get hurt than the man behind the gun."

CHAPTER XIX

BUT SUDDENLY BECOMES LONELY

AT Philip's apartment the brightly gilded clock ticked loudly on, vieing with Molly's voice as she sang about the business of getting dinner. Later, when it was quite dark and dinner was all ready to be eaten, it ticked impatiently, asking where the deuce this man could be at meal-time. Then, later still, when the dinner was cold and spoiled, it dragged its steps slowly across the silence of the apartment like a weary sentinel.

Molly sat at the window and waited, — not that she could see him if he came down the street but because it is a sort of instinct with women to look out into the night for their absent ones and to place a light in the window for their safe return.

From her window she could see the luminous cañon of Broadway, alive with a myriad of sliding lights. There was no sound of the machinery back of the lights and each one might have been a bright bead slipping down an inclined string.

At first the clock was companionable; later it jeered at the loneliness of the apartment and became so deliberate that Molly braced her nerves for the sharp pound of each tick.

After a while she put away the dinner uneaten and cleaned up the kitchen, getting things ready for a hasty luncheon when Philip should come in. He would surely be hungry because always before when he had skipped a meal at home and eaten somewhere else he had telephoned and dismissed her for the night. Because he had not telephoned she was sure that this time

he would be expecting something to eat at home.

So she resumed her seat at the window and patiently counted the slow footsteps of time that seemed somehow to be dragging Philip farther and farther away.

An inquisitive sun found her there in the morning, huddled up in the chair where she had fallen asleep.

She awakened with a sensation of numbness from sleeping in her clothes. The room was stuffy and strangely silent.

Uncle Sam must have come in while she was asleep and gone to bed without waking her. Then a recollection of Uncle Sam's kindness made her doubt. If he had come in, he would have picked her up, put her in his own bed and slept in the chair himself. She blushed as she thought of how he had done that on the night of her first arrival at the apartment.

She tip-toed to the bedroom and looked in. It had not been occupied.

With the clutch of fear at her heart she turned back.

There was a click of a key being inserted in the outer door.

He was coming!

Molly steadied herself so as not to let him see how upset she was.

The door opened and Mrs. Sutherland came in, — alone. The two women stared at each other across the table. Both were haggard, neither was as carefully dressed as usual. The older woman's features sagged a little as if she had not quite the strength to hold them up.

"Well," asked Molly, "where is he?"

"He's hurt," Marian explained briefly. "The automobile ran into a motor bus."

"Will he die?" Molly moistened her lips.

"Not if care and my prayers can pull

him through." Marian uttered this defiantly. "They took him to the hospital. He is sleeping now for the first time, and I came over to get some of his things and to tell you."

There was a thoughtful pause.

"He wants me to close up the place and get another position for you." Marian made this statement at the prompting of a wildly fluttering heart that kept assuring her that "all is fair in love and war."

"Yes," assented Molly dully. "It doesn't matter about me."

"Later," added Marian, "he may want you to come back. At present he can't afford to keep you and I will take care of him because — because —"

"Because you love him," supplied Molly.

"He saved my life," Marian explained simply.

At Marian's suggestion Molly found

a few things Philip would require and packed them in a grip she found in his room. Then she stood watching Marian dully, as yet not comprehending the catastrophe that had befallen her household.

When Marian was quite ready to go she addressed Molly once more.

"If you'll come to my apartment this afternoon and bring your key I will see what I can do for you. Suppose you come at three o'clock."

Involuntarily as one does in making an appointment she glanced at the clock.

"Why," she exclaimed, "your clock has stopped!"

"Yes." Molly knew now why the room had seemed so lifeless when she had wakened.

Molly got her hat and coat from the closet.

"Wait," she requested. "I will give

you the key now. I'd rather not stay here any more."

She produced a key from her purse and handed it to Marian.

"There was no money left," she answered, in response to a question she thought she saw in Marian's eye.

"He was quite poor then?"

"Dreadfully."

Molly hesitated a moment. "There's one other thing," she requested, removing the chamois bag from her neck. "When Mr. Smith is well, quite recovered, not before, will you give him this? I assure you it will answer any questions he may ask about me."

"Certainly." Marian took the bag and held it curiously. "But someway you don't talk like a German peasant girl this morning. Who are you?"

Molly shook her head. "It doesn't matter. Good-bye. I hope —"

A rising sob choked her speech and she opened the door hastily and went out. For a while the woman she had left in possession of the apartment could hear her walking down the stairs.

All at once Marian ran to the top of the staircase and called, "Molly, Molly."

The footsteps grew fainter.

She rang for the elevator and descended.

She looked to the right and to the left. The street was jammed with people and fire-fighting apparatus.

The building across the way was suffering from a false alarm.

And Molly was lost in the crowd.

CHAPTER XX

AND THEN DESOLATE

THE next person to cross the threshold of Philip's apartment was Philip himself, and the event did not occur until many weeks afterward. All of his bones were there, as one could tell at a glance, but nature had not yet had time to do any padding or decorating. He walked uncertainly and each step seemed an experiment with unfamiliar apparatus.

He had proved a bad patient, uncomplaining it is true, but chafing at restraint and restless to get back to work. The fact that he had been obliged to accept Marian's generous aid worried him despite her iteration of her debt to him for saving her life.

The news of Molly's departure he had accepted without comment. He had not been told until several days after the event and his mind had been so dulled by pain and opiates that he had not realized very keenly what it meant to him.

Now as he opened the door and gazed around his home it was as if he looked at a frame from which the picture had been taken. The air was still and dead from endless warming over by steam heat. The table was set but the glass of water looked stale and had bubbles in it. He turned and faced the clock and as he gazed at its dumb countenance he recalled his promise to Molly that no one should ever wind it but herself.

As he went about the apartment he couldn't find any place he felt at home in. He discovered that suddenly all of his own belongings had become merely appurtenances to Molly, and without her they

were cheerless and dead. It was like exploring the ruins of a house unearthed at Pompeii with everything standing just as the inhabitants had left it when they stepped out into the street a couple of thousand years ago to see what was happening in the city.

Jack found him at his desk studying the first reader. The artist tactfully made no reference to Molly's absence but asked Philip to come out to luncheon with him. Philip pretended to enjoy the meal very much, carefully concealing from his friend the fact that the soup tasted like dish water and the coffee was bitter as gall. It wasn't the fault of the chef; any food would have tasted that way unless Molly had prepared it.

They discussed Philip's novel, which had been accepted during his illness. Jack was doing the illustrations for it, which was as they both wished.

The advance royalty Philip had received from the publisher for his book relieved the financial crisis which had been impending at the time of the accident and left Philip not only free to write another novel to follow up his first if it should prove successful, but also to reimburse Marian for the expenses of his illness.

Jack had with him a few sketches which he wished Philip to pass on before he turned them over to the publisher. After luncheon Philip looked them over silently.

"Well,—" Jack paused expectantly, inviting criticism or approval.

"They're corking, Jack," Philip replied, "only —"

"Only what?"

"It isn't just the way I had pictured the girl. I daresay I shall get used to her this way and like her better after a bit."

"It isn't necessary. I'd like to try again."

"My Lord, Jack, what's that?" Philip straightened in his chair and listened intently.

The orchestra had started to play softly a simple melody that would hardly engage the mind of the average New York diner for an instant.

Jack listened. He knew what it was. It was the song Molly always sang about her work. But Jack was helping to wean Philip so he said, "Why, I don't know. It sounds like something from that new opera at the Casino. It's by a foreign composer, I think."

Philip failed to get back into his mood for writing. His rooms became intolerable to him. They seemed to eject him automatically every time he settled down to work. Finally he decided that he had been spoiled by having a servant and he visited a number of employment agencies looking for a substitute for Molly. After he had

looked into the stolid faces of the applicants waiting for positions in those places he admitted shamelessly it was not a servant that he was looking for. Molly alone would do and at the other agencies he inquired if they had on their books any record of a small, blonde person answering to his departed maid's description.

He found a good many and looking them up occupied considerable time. Most of them turned out to be Scandinavian socialists with one-cylinder minds and double-opposed feet.

Then he put a personal advertisement in the papers and was surprised at the number of humorists who took the trouble to answer him facetiously.

It was no use. The city had swallowed her up completely and had doubtless by this time digested her into a commonplace, typical American girl of the lower class.

The hurt grew duller, though it still per-

sisted, and Philip found time to pay part of his debt of gratitude to Marian by being nice to her. He was still pale and easily exhausted and he often sat long hours in her apartment, sometimes not saying much but soothed by her companionship. Once or twice Marian had started to speak of Molly but he had seemed averse to the subject and afterwards she avoided it.

The little chamois bag lay at the bottom of a drawer in Marian's bedroom! She assured herself occasionally that she had forgotten to give it to him and that it was better for him not to be reminded of a mistake he had almost made. Anyway, and this was the last argument with which she bolstered up her conduct, all was fair in love and war.

CHAPTER XXI

IS ANYTHING AKIN TO LOVE?

AT last Marian's procedure seemed to have its effect. Philip practically gave up searching for Molly and unconsciously included Marian in most of his plans. When not working he either looked her up and took her somewhere or spent his time at her apartment across the hall. Sometimes Jack was in the party but more often not.

One evening he dropped in at twilight for a smoke before dinner.

"I was going to give a birthday party to-morrow in my own honor," he stated, helping himself to his favorite brand of cigarettes, which she always kept on the mantel, "but Jack has a previous engage-

ment so I guess we'll have to call off our celebration."

"Why?" She stepped close to him and took hold of the lapels of his coat. "I haven't any previous engagement. I never have, — since I've known you."

"I didn't suppose you would care to have a celebration without Jack."

"It isn't Jack who makes it a celebration for me." She bored her fingers through the buttonholes of his coat and looked down. Then all at once she raised her eyes, great, deep dark pools glistening with tears just unshed. "Oh Phil, please be very nice to me because I am awfully lonely and you can be so nice sometimes."

"Thank you," said he, smiling and taking her hands. "Then we'll have the party to-morrow anyway. Shall we dine at the Plaza and go to the opera or eat at Churchill's and go to Hammerstein's?"

"That's more like yourself." She patted

his hand gaily and released it. "I don't care what we do as long as I am with you."

Philip lit his cigarette and then glanced at her with sudden comprehension. "Marian," he said, "you and I are great pals, aren't we?"

She regarded him steadily and seriously. "Yes, I care a great deal about you. More than I should, I suspect. Every other man I ever met I wanted to have give up something for me, but I feel now as if I wanted to give up something for you." She broke off suddenly, then continued, "I'm very foolish to let you know this, but even if you didn't care a bit about me I'd have to tell you that if there should ever come a time when I should not be able to see you I shouldn't know whether the sun was shining or not, or if the birds came back in the spring, — personally I don't believe they would, — or if there were ever any more fresh apple-blossoms

in the orchards or violets in the woods, and if you were gone, all the music in the world would be frozen up like a tiny little brook in winter."

She turned her back to him suddenly so that he could not see her face.

He walked the length of the tiny apartment and looked out into the gray-black streets, chill in the dusk of a tired city. She came to his side.

"Marian," Philip began, strangely moved by the genuineness of the emotion, "you're one of the sweetest women I ever knew. There's something that I've had on the tip of my tongue to tell you for a long time."

Somewhere out in the street a beggar violinist attempted to stay the current of the home-bound throng with a plaintive melody. The people in the street hesitated not at all but as it floated faintly up to the window the melody awakened a

drowsy memory that Philip had been telling himself over and over again was dead. And the memory tugged gently at his heart-strings with a little, wistful, apologetic sort of pull as if it hated to bother him just then but just couldn't help asking if he noticed that fellow in the street there playing the song that Molly used to sing.

Philip turned uncertainly toward Marian and took her hands.

"But I can't tell you now, even," he said. "Will it be all right if I tell you to-morrow, after our party?"

She drew both his hands up to her cheeks and rested her face in his palms. Then she kissed first one and then the other and lowered them gently again.

"I'll let you go, because I want to do everything all the rest of my life just as you wish it done, even if it is saying good-bye sometime and letting you go forever.

Here, so that you won't forget, you must wear my rose." She took a red bud from her waist and put it in his buttonhole. "Now go and be as gentle with me in your thoughts as you can."

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN'S IDEAL IS SHATTERED; AND A WOMAN'S HEART

THE beggar musician in the street was still playing when Philip came out of the building, but he had changed his tune to the latest opus of the celebrated Mr. Berlin and was attracting a few nickels into the hat which was placed suggestively on the ground before him. He was a young fellow, from a warmer country than ours, as evidenced by a swarthy complexion and a certain abandon about his style of dressing for the winter. He unquestionably had a knowledge of music beyond most itinerant fiddlers and the way he handled a bow would have delighted Signor Campanini.

When he had finished the rag-time selection, Philip introduced himself by contributing half a dollar.

"A thousand thanks," smiled the musician. "You like some more rag-time." He raised his bow with a flourish.

"No," Philip restrained him. "Could you repeat the melody you played just before the last one?"

"Si." The boy looked at him with a quick smile of gratitude. "This, you mean?"

Softly, insinuatingly, he drew the simple, plaintive, little air out of his violin, which it seemed almost reluctant to leave, so shy and unassuming it was.

For Philip every stroke of the bow filled in the picture of a small but efficient blonde young person, dressed in an absurdly large, plaid, kitchen apron, with an expression of serious attention to business, singing softly to herself as she bent over her work.

When the musician had finished Philip

thanked him and was about to turn away when he stopped to ask casually, "Do you know the name of it?"

"Si — yes. It's one French chanson by Chaminade. In French it is called 'L'Anneau d'Argent.' That comes it out in English 'The Silver Ring.'"

"'The Silver Ring!'" That was curious, thought Philip, as he turned homeward.

It was not a melody that would ordinarily be popular with a large mass of the public. It was French, too. Strange that Molly should have picked it up. She would never have heard it in New York. Probably it was a reminiscence of her life before she came to him. It didn't matter.

Nothing about Molly mattered if he were going to marry Marian and there was no reason why he shouldn't marry her and be very happy. Surely it would be foolish to go on moping the rest of his life

because of a servant girl whom he would never see again.

He stopped at a restaurant and ate a perfunctory meal.

When he got back to his apartment he found that Jack had been there and left a drawing which he had shoved under the hall door.

A note accompanied the sketch:

Dear Phil:—

This is my new idea for a frontispiece for your book. You remember you said you did not like the other one I drew. I am not sure but I think this one will come nearer to meeting with your approval.

Hastily,
Jack.

Philip turned back the paper flap which protected it from rubbing and looked into the timid, pleading eyes of Molly, dressed as she was that night when she had come to him out of the rain.

With a dumb, dull hurt in his eyes he placed it upright on his desk.

His heart protested that it wasn't fair for him to ask it to keep on forgetting a person and then to have continual reminders of that person flaunted before it. You couldn't expect a really hard heart to withstand shocks like that and with a soft, wabbly one like his own it was out of the question. "Are we or are we not going to forget her?" his heart demanded crossly, beating very fast and climbing up in his throat because it knew that made him uncomfortable. "Are we?"

"We can't," the man answered simply, and dropped his head on his arms to shut out the sight of her as she stood in front of him on his desk, her eyes repeating over and over the words that he would never again hear from her lips; "Choo — choo — choo, Uncle Sam, I love you."

He was bent over like that when Marian

opened the door softly and tip-toed up behind him. In her eyes was a look of tenderness and pity and she was about to reach out and touch his hair when she saw the picture on his desk before him.

A look of unearthly pain crossed her features and she stood for a moment scarcely breathing while the soul of her sickened and died.

Then as silently as she had come she reached the door and went out.

CHAPTER XXIII

A VAMPIRE TURNS OUT TO BE ONLY A WOMAN

THE following day in the mail came a small parcel and a letter from Marian. Wondering, he opened the letter first. It was rather unusual of Marian to write. It was her custom when she had anything to say to him to run in for a few moments or to call him up on the telephone. The letter ran:

My dear Mr. Smith: — (Rather formal, thought Philip, but read on.) Please consider everything that passed between us as a joke. Am called away suddenly for a few weeks so if I don't see you again, good-bye. I am sending you by this mail a small package which Molly gave me to give to you. She said you would understand and because I was selfish I did

not do it and I shall probably regret, all the rest of my life, that I have finally done as she requested.

Yours,
Marian.

"Now what the deuce does she mean by that?" thought Philip, as he untied the string of the small accompanying parcel. "It sounds as if she were sore about something."

After the wrappings came away there lay in his hand a small chamois bag which he recognized as the one which Molly had worn around her neck. Apathetically he opened it and held it upside down in his hand. Into his palm dropped the curious Chinese good luck ring that he had given to his wife on his wedding day.

Stunned he sat slowly absorbing the significance of that ring in the possession of Molly. What a fool he had been not to see through her masquerade in the first place! How she must have laughed at

the way she had tricked him! What a lark for a woman of wealth to dress up and act as an emigrant girl for a little time and then when the amusement palled to go back to her accustomed luxurious mode of life! Molly was dead forever. True, a woman lived who spoke with her voice and doubtless walked as she did but the spirit had fled. Molly with a million dollars was not Molly. The real Molly had existed only in his own imagination.

His first sensations were those of blind anger. A man hates to be fooled, especially by one he cares a good deal about. It was in this mood that he wrote to her.

My dear Mrs. Smith: —

I wish to offer belated congratulations on your ability as an actress. I paid you the sincere tribute of being convinced by it. Now that the comedy is over there is no reason for delaying longer about the divorce, is there?

I want to feel sure that the next woman I meet is not my wife. I have several things of yours, some solid silver, a first reader, a clock and a complete peasant costume including wooden-soled shoes. May I send them to you or, if you would prefer that I should not know your real address, will you have your footman call for them? (You have a footman, of course.) I will leave the key with the hall-boy for him and will leave your things so they can be easily found.

I know you will find the costume and properties useful in your future relation with the gentleman who was looking for the North Pole when we first met. I trust he is as easily entertained as

Yours sincerely,
Philip Smith.

He addressed it in care of Doctor Allen.

Several hours after he mailed it he began to regret the sarcastic tone of his letter. After all what right had he to scold a person who was nearly a stran-

ger, because he had happened to fall in love with her? She had not asked him to do that, probably did not know that he had. On the credit side of her account there certainly stood the salvage of his life when he had considered it worthless, to say nothing of the restoration of his eyesight. She had made his future possible. Surely she had a right to do what she wanted to with it. If playing tricks was her idea of amusement he owed it to her to be a complaisant subject.

He decided that in the morning he would go to Doctor Allen's office before he had any opportunity to forward the letter to his wife and reclaim it. He could ask the doctor to notify her of his desires in the divorce matter without letting her know that he was hurt. An annulment of their marriage would be easily obtained and they could both be free. Decidedly that would be better than to let her get the letter.

The next morning Philip called up a storage warehouse and van company and asked them to send a man to give him an estimate on moving his few belongings. His apartment was too full of uneasy memories for him to be able to work there longer in peace. He would go to a boarding-house or a small family hotel in the neighborhood, any place where he would not be continually reminded of Molly.

Before he left the building to go to Doctor Allen's office for the purpose of retrieving his hasty letter, he deposited his key with Louie, the hall-boy, and instructed him to show the warehouse man his belongings if he should arrive during his absence.

Half an hour or so later a simply tailored young woman, rather small and quite pale, with great, big, pleading eyes, approached the hall-boy's desk and asked if Mr. Smith were in.

Louie glanced at her casually then jumped out of his chair as if he had been jabbed with a hat-pin.

"Molly!" he shouted, then looked again doubtfully. "Is it Molly?"

"Yes, Louie, it's Molly."

"Gee, you've learned to be an American awful fast. I'm awful glad you're back. Maybe Mr. Smith won't be glad too. He looks awful sick, but your cooking will fix him up again. You look sort of like he does youself, — like nothing agreed with you. You've been sick, too, ain't you?"

"No, Louie," she answered, listlessly. "I'm all right. If Mr. Smith is home I wish you would go up and ask him to give you my things. Only please don't tell him I'm down here. Tell him a footman in a fine white livery called for them."

"He ain't here." Louie looked in the drawer for Philip's key. "He left his key, though, and you can go up yourself and

find your stuff." He held the key out to Molly.

"He might come back while I was in his apartment." Molly looked at the key dubiously. "I would really rather not see him."

"That's all right," the boy assured her, leading the way to the elevator; "he won't be back for quite a while, he said. I'll open the door for you myself." Then as an afterthought he invited, "Come on and ride in the elevator. Nobody would ever know you was a servant. You look lots sweller than some of the ladies that lives here."

"Thank you, Louie." Molly rewarded him with a smile, "I should like to ride in the elevator very much as I am quite tired."

Louie unlocked Philip's door and admitted Molly.

"Gee, look at the picture of you he's got."

For a moment Molly's heart stood still when she realized where her picture stood, directly in front of Philip's chair; then her reason assured her that it was coincidence. If he had remembered her enough to honor her picture thus intentionally, he would have sent her the ring and asked her to come back.

"It looks almost exactly like you," commented Louie, "only it ain't quite as pretty." He went to the door and fussed with the spring lock. "I'll fix the latch on the door so it don't lock and when you come down again you can change it back. I'll see you again before you go."

When she was alone Molly let her eyes slowly travel over the various things in the room. The table was set for one, even to a glass of water, but there were bubbles in the water and a rose in a vase on the table had dropped its petals in a circle on the cloth. An apron lay across the

back of a chair. She had placed it there when she left. She turned to the mantelpiece. The clock was piteously silent and the hands stood where they had halted on the night when Philip did not come home.

With a sigh she turned and began to pick up the silver and things which Philip had requested her to take away.

At last she had everything. After a final look around she closed the door after her. As she did so the door of the apartment opposite opened and from it issued Mrs. Sutherland in a travelling costume, carrying a small grip. She stood face to face with Molly.

"Oh," she gasped. "I didn't know you were here."

"No, I suppose not," replied Molly, coolly, "but I'm just going so it doesn't matter." She started for the elevator.

Marian called after her, "Molly."

Molly turned. "Mrs. Philip Smith, if you please —" she corrected, icily.

Marian stood as if frozen while she straightened things out in her mind. At last she spoke slowly, "I don't quite understand everything but I think I have an inkling. Will you explain one thing?"

"If I can," Molly replied, patiently.

"Why," asked Marian, "didn't Mr. Smith recognize you in Molly?"

"He had never seen me before, at least since I've grown up. When we were married he was blind. Now unless there is something else I can explain to you I will leave you in full possession of the field and my husband."

As she pressed the button for the elevator Marian stopped her. "Mrs. Smith."

Molly answered pleasantly, "Well, Mrs. Sutherland?"

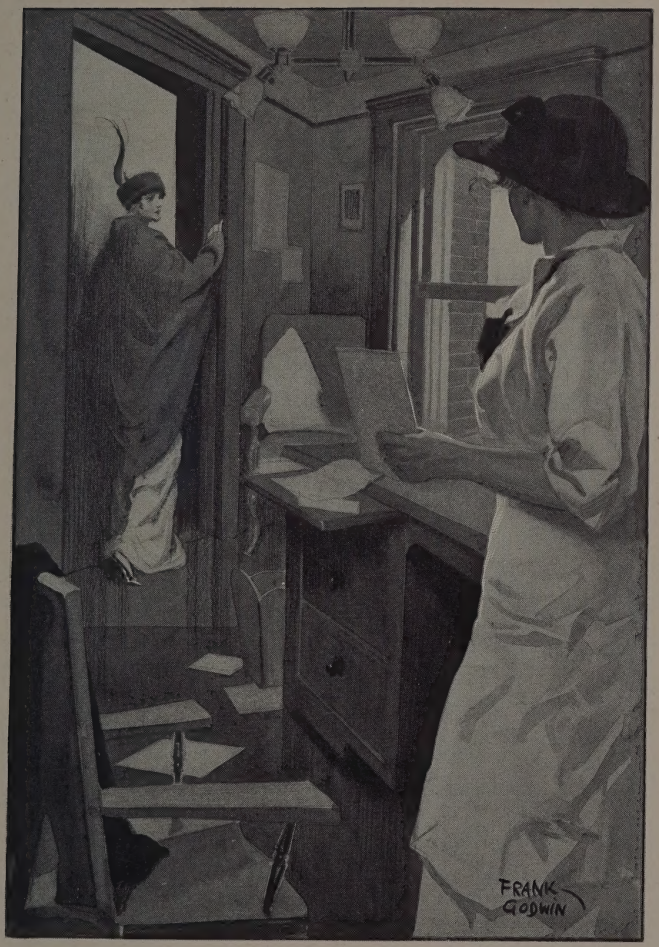
"You don't like me very well, do you, Mrs. Smith?"

"Why, certainly," Molly said, slowly, "I like you fully as well as I do most people on short acquaintance."

"Nevertheless," insisted the older woman, "I feel that you have an idea that I am not your friend. On the contrary I am very anxious to do you a service. There is something I have to say to you before you go. It's rather difficult for me to do. It's about Mr. Smith."

"Oh! Are congratulations in order?"

"No. You are entirely mistaken. So was I until yesterday. And I didn't play fair until yesterday. I did not give him the chamois bag you had left for him with the ring in it. Oh yes, I looked, but I never understood what it meant, before. I thought I could make him forget you, — that's why I let you go away in the first place. But yesterday I found out that there was no room for me in his heart



"If you ever discover that you don't care for him so much, oh, please, please, send him to me."

because even the memory of you had crowded everything else out."

Molly started to speak but Marian silenced her with a gesture and continued. "You must believe that what I say is true. If it were not so, if I even thought there was a chance for me, I would never tell you this. I am selfish and I need him more than you do, but I want him to be happy. It is no easy thing for a woman to give up the man she cares for to the woman he loves. I don't think there is anything more I can say. I am the one who is going away."

The elevator cable creaked noisily as the car rose.

Marian went to the shaft herself and, as she stood waiting, turned back and said with a break in her voice, "If you ever discover that you don't care for him so much, — oh, please, please, send him to me."

The elevator door opened and she stepped in.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GENTLEMAN LEARNS A FEW THINGS ABOUT HIS WIFE

DOCTOR Allen, the celebrated eye and ear specialist, shared a suite of offices with several other physicians and they all contributed toward the salaries of two young women who were called stenographers but who in reality performed many and varied duties, ranging from expert accounting to assisting as nurses in delicate operations. One of them was large and heavy, with big, strong hands, and the other was quite small and light both in weight and complexion. But her slender fingers were just as capable as those of the big one and together they formed an invaluable adjunct to the medical expert whom they served.

It was the tall one who was in the reception room when Philip arrived and she took his card in to Doctor Allen who invited him in at once.

"No more trouble with the eyes, I hope," the doctor said, after he had greeted his friend and former patient.

"None at all, I'm glad to say," Philip responded. "I came to you this time with another kind of trouble. Have you that letter handy that I sent in your care to be forwarded to my wife?"

"A letter? To your wife?" Doctor Allen knitted his brows uncomprehendingly. "I don't believe I know anything about this."

"I mailed a letter to Mrs. Philip Smith last night, addressed in care of this office, with a request to forward. I am very anxious to get it back."

"I see." The doctor pressed a push button on his desk. "One of the stenographers always attends to the mail so I

didn't see it. I wouldn't know where to forward it if I had."

The young woman from the outer office entered.

"Louise," asked the doctor, "was there a letter in the mail this morning addressed to 'Mrs. Philip Smith' in care of me?"

"Yes, sir."

Philip breathed a sigh of relief.

"Bring it in please," the doctor directed.

"I haven't it. Mary took it and said she would attend to forwarding it."

"Oh, then ask Mary to bring it in."

"I'm sorry but Mary went out half an hour ago and hasn't come back yet. She seemed terribly upset about something."

"I'm sorry. She hasn't been well lately anyway. That's all, Louise. Let me know when Mary returns."

He turned back to Philip. "We have two stenographers and Mary, the one who has your letter, is out. She'll be back

presently, I'm sure. By the way, I didn't know that you were married."

"Didn't know I was married?" Philip repeated blankly. "Why, I married your own ward."

"My ward? I haven't any ward." The doctor looked anxiously at the pupil of Philip's eye as if he expected to discover symptoms of insanity. "Have you got a fever, Philip?"

"No, of course not." He brushed the doctor's solicitude impatiently aside. "I certainly married a girl who said she was your ward. It was the day I was in your office when I was first blind, do you remember? She said she had to be married by the next day or lose all her fortune so I went through the ceremony with her just to be obliging. Later she wrote me a letter from your office here saying she was getting a divorce."

"This is all wild talk," the doctor replied,

in a soothing tone. "It isn't like real life a bit. It sounds like the plot of a story."

"I'll tell you how real it is," Philip stated firmly, "it's so real that this girl, whoever she is, gave me a thousand dollars to go to Switzerland and save my eyes."

"Gave you a thousand dollars!" exclaimed the doctor. "Why, I was the one who sent you a thousand dollars."

"No, no," insisted Philip politely. "Don't you remember, you offered it to me right here in this office but I refused it."

"I know you did, here, but after you left my stenographer said she thought she knew a way to make you take it and she went after you. She had some foolish idea in her head that you were going to commit suicide. When she came back she had you all fixed up and on the way to Europe."

"Oh!" Philip sat as if stunned. "Is this girl of yours by any chance a rather

small, blonde sort of person with big eyes, who can cook better than anyone else in the world?"

Doctor Allen laughed. "I don't know whether she can cook or not but she's the best assistant I ever had. Otherwise you have described her."

"Is there a scar on her cheek something like a dimple?"

"Why, yes, although you don't notice it after you know her."

"And is she very rich, the heiress of an eccentric aunt?"

"I'm afraid not. She may have some money saved up from her salary but not much because she laid off quite a while this winter. Anything she has she earned herself, I'm pretty sure."

Philip rose from his chair.

"I want to see that stenographer of yours, and I'll wait in the outer office until she comes in."

The door opened and Louise came in with a memorandum.

"Mary just called up," she announced. "She said to tell you that she isn't coming back and that she wishes to resign for good. She says she has gone home to her own family."

Philip's heart smote him. That letter! It had crushed the spirit of the poor girl. He must find her and make reparation.

"Where is her home?" he demanded, fiercely. "Where does her family live?"

"I don't know," answered the girl.

"Neither do I," said Doctor Allen. "I always supposed she was an orphan."

"If she comes back," directed Philip on his way to the door, "tell her to wait here for me."

"Where are you going?" the doctor queried mildly.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find my wife if it takes the rest of my life."

CHAPTER XXV

A BACHELOR APARTMENT BECOMES THE HOME OF A FAMILY

FINDING a blonde in New York where they sell peroxide so cheaply is more easily said than done. Philip visited all the railroad stations and boat docks in a vain search for Molly, or Mary or Mrs. Philip Smith. He forgot about lunch and business apointments and spent money on taxi-cabs as if advance royalties would last forever.

At dusk, tired and discouraged, he found himself in the neighborhood of his own apartment and he went home for a change of linen.

"Did the man from the storage warehouse come while I was away?" he asked of the hall-boy, as he stopped for his key.

"The guy is up there now," replied Louie, who seemed bubbling over with unaccustomed good spirits. "Just walk right in."

His door was standing ajar and the lights were lit inside. The living-room was empty but there was someone stirring about in the kitchenette. Probably it was the moving-van man.

"Hello, there," called Philip.

From the kitchenette entered a man wearing a badge which proclaimed him an appraiser for a warehouse and van company.

"Are you Mr. Smith?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes."

The man handed him a list of articles of furniture and household goods. "Is this correct? Is that the stuff you want moved?"

Philip glanced down the list.

"One desk. Correct." He glanced at

his desk. "Who has been picking up my manuscripts?" he demanded, as he opened a drawer. "Oh, it's all right. They've been put away in the right place. One chair. O. K. One clock —"

He faced the mantel and stood with his speech unfinished.

"Tell me, man," he said, grabbing the appraiser by the arm, "is that clock going?"

"It is. Can't you hear it? It makes more noise than a blacksmith shop."

Philip listened. It certainly was ticking, and in the hush one other sound rose on the air. Someone was singing out in the kitchenette, — singing "The Silver Ring."

Without a word Philip took the man from the warehouse and van company by the arm, led him gently to the door and outside. There he fished a five-dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to the man.

"Here," he whispered, "go out on

Broadway and Forty-second street, — that's about four miles from here, — and buy yourself a cigar."

The man was mystified but willing to be agreeable. "Then what shall I do?"

"I don't care. You might go to the Montauk Theater over in Brooklyn and see a show and after that take a boat to Albany. It doesn't matter as long as you never come back."

Leaving the amazed man clutching the five-dollar bill and muttering words of thanks Philip closed the door and went to his desk.

He sat down, got out some paper and a pencil and started writing. After he had covered a page or so, he tapped the bell which stood at his right hand and went on with his work.

In the kitchenette the singing stopped as if the singer had been suddenly shot. There was a short, breathless pause and

then came the clatter of wooden shoes across the floor into the living-room. The noise ceased somewhere back of him a little to one side.

Philip did not look up but wrote on to the end of the page.

"Molly," he said sternly, without turning.

"Did you want me, Uncle Sam?"

His words sounded hoarse and far away but he still looked at the paper before him. "Yes, Molly, I want you more than anything else in all the world. What have you to say to that?"

"Uncle Sam, I love you." And then, as he turned blindly to find her, a voice with laughter and tears in it all mixed up so that nobody could ever sort them out again came from the little figure kneeling at his feet.

"I'm not way up there, I'm down here."

Philip leaned down, picked his wife up

and placed her cosily on his knee. Then he fished with a hooked forefinger into his waistcoat pocket and extracted a curious, age-tarnished ring of silver, bearing in place of a seal the fantastic device indicating the Celestial idea of the words "Good Fortune." He took Molly's little soft white hand, placed the ring on the proper finger, and fastened it there forever with a kiss.

Molly looked at the ring a full half minute, and she too kissed it. Then she turned her lovely, brimming eyes up to her husband's face. Her arms slid around his neck and she nestled close. On the mantel an ornate clock tried hard to attract attention by striking loudly — but neither Molly nor Philip heard it.

THE END